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„Speaking Bodies and Faces: Functions of  
Physiognomic Descriptions in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*  
by Charlotte Brontë“

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## 1 Introduction

The fire shone full on his face. I knew my traveller, with his broad and jetty eyebrows, his square forehead, made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair. I recognized his decisive nose, more remarkable for character than beauty; his full nostrils, denoting, I thought, choler; his grim mouth, chin, and jaw – yes, all three were very grim, and no mistake. His shape, now divested of cloak, I perceived harmonized in squareness with his physiognomy. I suppose it was a good figure in the athletic sense of the term - broad-chested and thinflanked, though neither tall nor graceful. (JE 122)

This is how Jane Eyre describes Mr Rochester when she encounters him for the second time, and has the chance to look at him more closely. What is probably most striking about the lines above is that they do not only describe Mr Rochester's appearance but in the same breath give an account of his character traits. Jane Eyre does not only see the other characters in the story, but she 'reads' them like open books. The belief in a 'readable world' was widespread at the time of Charlotte Brontë's writing, and in this paper I would like to take a closer look at two of her novels, *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853), and will try to show what physiognomic descriptions reveal about the characters, how big their potential is to guide and influence the reader, to what degree they determine the plot line, and what they might tell the literary scholar about 19<sup>th</sup> century literary conventions and episteme.

Studies on physiognomy, which sought a direct connection of human appearance and character, date back to Ancient Greece, and became very popular again around 1900. Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801), a Swiss pastor, was one of the key figures in the process of establishing physiognomy as a science in the modern sense. He tried to support his assumptions with general rules and principles, and created a system, according to which colour, shape and size of certain body features could be read as an outward sign for a characteristic that its carrier was assumed to possess (see Lachs 24). His most influential work, *Physiognomische Fragmente* which was published in four parts between 1775 and 1778, was translated into various languages and became immensely important and influential (see Jack 380-381). Lavater's theories will serve as the main source for the second chapter of this paper, the aim of which

is to enable a thorough understanding of the physiognomic doctrines developed and applied in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century on the one hand and to illustrate how popular physiognomy was when it emerged in the ancient world and that it remained so until the time when Brontë was writing her novels on the other hand. For the sake of easy readability, I will quote from the English translation by Thomas Holcroft when possible. Alongside chapter 3, which will briefly explain the weaknesses of physiognomic descriptions in the written medium, it will provide a useful theoretical background for the analyses presented in chapters 4 and 5. These chapters will offer a close examination of text passages from the primary sources with regard to traces of physiognomy, paying particular attention to the body parts described and the adjectives used. These chapters are mainly meant to display and observe the frequency of physiognomic character portraits, and to introduce those characters that are most often read physiognomically. It will be the prime task of chapter 6 to reveal certain methods that Brontë applies when describing faces, figures and characters. Amongst others, the following questions will be answered: How are her character portraits implemented in the novel and who presents them to the reader? Is there an uninvolved third person narrator or are intra-diegetic physiognomists reading the characters' faces? How vividly and realistically are faces described and by which rhetorical devices and stylistic methods are the various functions of physiognomic descriptions achieved? This last question will provide the transition to the next chapter of the paper, which will give an account of the manifold functions that these descriptions fulfil in the novel. The aim is to show what Brontë's descriptions are likely to trigger in the reader, and to what degree it might be possible to draw conclusions on Brontë's episteme by closely studying her character portraits. The practical analysis contained in chapters 6 and 7 will mainly be based on the primary texts, but will partly draw upon Wolf's elaborated theories on physiognomy in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature.

The last part of the paper will then recapitulate parts of the findings, and reveal to what extent the great emphasis on physiognomic character descriptions and the functions Brontë is achieving are typical of late 19<sup>th</sup> century literature and emphasise those points that might be exceptional or unique about Brontë's work. Can her two novels *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* be seen to mirror a 19<sup>th</sup> century

literary zeitgeist or does she differ considerably from her contemporaries? The last chapter will have a look at these questions and try to regard Charlotte Brontë's novels in connection with and comparison to works by other authors of that time.

## **2 Lavater's Physiognomy**

### **2.1 Definition and relevance**

The core of Lavater's Physiognomy might best be put in a nutshell with the help of one of his own explanations, which will serve as an introduction to readers who are not, or only partly familiar with the principle of physiognomy:

Die Physiognomik ist keine eingebildete, sondern eine wirkliche Wissenschaft. Sagt uns die Vernunft nicht, dass jedes Ding in der Welt eine äußere und eine innere Seite habe, welche in einer genauen Beziehung stehen? [...] Dass ich eine solche Hand habe und keine andere, gibt sogleich zu erkennen, dass ich eine so und so bestimmte Seele habe (qut. in Buttkus 13-14).

This quotation, firstly, explains the idea that underlies the principle, namely the assumption of the existence of a direct and logical connection between outside and inside. Secondly, it clarifies that this "science", as it is referred to in the above lines was not based on evidence, such as measurable dates and facts, but more on "reason". This is a very imprecise parameter, and *The Monthly Review* in a reaction to the first volume of the French edition criticised that "Lavater depended too much on feeling" (qut. in Graham 564). In one of his writings, Lavater apologises for and at the same time tries to justify his practice of basing his findings on "reason" or "common-place truth", by saying: "I hope I shall be pardoned the repetition of common-place truths, since on these is built the science of physiognomy, or the proper study of man" (Lavater, *Physiognomy* 27).

The essence of Lavater's doctrine was the collection and grouping of empirical data, from which –probably according to his own reason and commonplace truth- universally valid conclusions were drawn (see Lachs 24). This urge to create a coherent system of physiognomic features that would turn out to be universally valid and applicable was probably due to his ambition to qualify his findings on physiognomy as scientific. The reason for Lavater's striving for scientific acknowledgement of his doctrine is retrospectively interpreted as

being part of a general “Szientifizierungsschub”, a “process of scientification” that evolved around 1800 and is described in von Arburg as a trend towards the application of mathematical methods in all sciences, including the humanities. This sudden pressure for legitimising his work in a scientific realm might also explain why his argumentation for physiognomy as a science turns out to be rather ambivalent, as he refers to early physiognomists to support his theories on the one hand, and tries to distance himself from them in his attempt to create a purely scientific basis for the ancient practice of physiognomy on the other hand (see von Arburg 42-43).

Lavater’s doctrine is not based on the mere assertion that the surface reveals something about inner qualities but it offers potential reasons for this interdependence of body and soul. The direct connection between inside and outside is presented as being a logical result of the reciprocal relationship of the two, which firstly implies the psyche shaping the body, and secondly the body providing modes of expressing certain emotions: “Zu einem bestimmten Körperbau gehört ein bestimmter Charakter. Das Psychische modelt sich sein körperliches Gehäuse wie der Leib gemäß seiner Art den Seelenregungen Entfaltungsmöglichkeiten eröffnet [...]” (Henning in Buttkus 40). This corresponds to a great extent with what Züst calls Lavater’s “Gesetz der Entsprechung” or what Arburg terms “[die] Theorie von der “Harmonie der moralischen und körperlichen Schönheit”, which is described in Lavater’s *Essays on Physiognomy* as follows:

Each frequently repeated state, form and change of countenance impresses, at length, a durable trait on the soft and flexible parts of the face. The stronger the change, and the oftener it is repeated, the stronger, deeper, and more indelible is the trait. We shall hereafter shew [sic] that the like impression is made in early youth, even on the bony parts. An agreeable change, by constant repetitions makes an impression on, and adds a feature of durable beauty to, the countenance. A disagreeable change, by constant repetition, makes an impression on, and adds a feature of durable deformity to, the countenance. A number of such like beautiful changes, when combined, if not counteracted, impart beauty to the face; and many deformed changes impart deformity. [...] The foregoing propositions, combined, will give the following theorem: The beauty and deformity of the countenance is in a just, and determinate, proportion to the moral beauty and deformity of the man.

The morally best, the most beautiful.  
The morally worst, the most deformed. (180-183)



The notion expressed in the quotation above, namely that of traits that are inscribed on faces after repeated expressions of some kind, cannot be regarded as a purely physiognomic idea, as it also seems to be informed by pathognomy, a principle that allows to study the impressions of facial movements onto the countenance. Retrospectively, Lavater can be said to have applied pathognomy in the course of his descriptions, which is due to the close relation of these two sciences and the great degree of overlap. For an introduction to Pathognomy and its importance inside Lavater's Physiognomy see the subsequent section 2.2.3.

In Lavater's concept of physiognomy and pathognomy, as discussed so far, it is clearly assumed that morally good people are beautiful, and morally bad people are ugly, or as Züst would put it: "Lavaters ganze Physiognomik ruht auf dem Glauben, daß [sic] sich Körperliches und Geistiges auf einfache Weise entsprechen. Das innerlich Schöne erweist sich auch dem äußern Auge als sichtbare Schönheit, und das innerlich Häßliche [sic] erweist sich ihm als sichtbare Hässlichkeit [sic]" (Züst 41). For a detailed discussion of beauty in physiognomy, and to what degree this notion corresponds with the concept of beauty in Brontë, see section 2.4.

The conclusion that is analogically drawn from the assumption of parallels of body and soul is the notion, discussed in Buttkus, that people who are similar in their outer appearance also show similarities in terms of their characters and vice versa. This assumption is especially interesting as it will play a significant role in section 6.4., where Brontë's method of presenting "similar and contrastive pairs of characters" will be illustrated on the basis of examples from her novels.

Wohin [der Physiognomiker] schaut: überall kommen ihm Beweise entgegen, daß [sic] Körperbau und Charakter einander entsprechen. Je ähnlicher zwei Personen im Körperlichen sind, umso eindeutiger wird dadurch ihre charakterliche Verwandtschaft offenbar. Umgekehrt machen große Abweichungen in Kopfform, Gesichts- und Handbildung auf ebensolche Abweichungen im Geistig-Seelischen aufmerksam" (Buttkus, 41).

This assumption of outwardly and inwardly similar characters was discussed critically by Lavater himself in his *Essays on Physiognomy* where Lavater reacts to a comment by an unknown author which reads as follows:

'It is far from being proved that resemblance of form universally denotes resemblance of mind. In families where there is most resemblance, there are often the greatest varieties of mind. I have known twins, not to be distinguished from each other, between whose minds there was not the least similarity.'

Lavater's reaction to this is rather emotional as he writes: "If this be literally true, I will renounce physiognomy; and, to whoever shall convince me of it, I will give my copy of these fragments, and a hundred physiognomical drawings. [...] In all the experiments I have made, I declare, upon my honour, I have never made any such remark" (Lavater, *Physiognomy* 173). His reaction again supports the fact that his theory is mainly based on empirical data that he has collected himself, and he does not insist on the universal validity of his theory, but rather defends his experiential findings. Although the collection of data and their later schematisation makes his work seem scientific and rational, his evaluations of the findings are always guided by reason and personal impressions. Such inconsistencies in argumentation made Lavater's theory very vulnerable to criticism and exposed it as pseudo-scientific in the eyes of many contemporaries.

The theories on readable faces and bodies that have been summarised and presented up to this point will have to be contextualised historically and connected to Brontë's work in a next step. It will be the aim of the subsequent paragraphs to establish a connection between physiognomy and the time of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in general and Brontë's writing in particular.

The influence of physiognomy and phrenology, which will be explained more closely in section 2.2.3, on Charlotte Brontë's writing has been revealed and discussed repeatedly, e.g. by Ian Jack who claims that

Charlotte Brontë's insight into character had its origin in close observation, and I hope to persuade you that this was encouraged by her interest in physiognomy and phrenology, two related aspects of psychology which were popular in her day, and which supported the belief that a trained eye could

learn to “read” human character from certain external indications in the face and head. (378)

The popularity of Lavater’s doctrine at the time of Brontë’s writing was enormous. This can be traced in writings from that time, as for example in an article in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* from 1801 where Lavater’s writings “were thought as necessary in every family as even the Bible itself. A servant would, at one time, scarcely be hired till the descriptions and engravings of Lavater had been consulted, in careful comparison with the lines and features of the young man’s or woman’s countenance” (Graham 561). The reactions to Lavater’s doctrine and the great popularity it achieved were manifold and oppositional. Criticism was uttered in *The Monthly Review*, concerning Lavater’s reliance on feeling, and the fact that his “distinctions were too fine”. A highly affirmative review was published in *The European Magazine*, in which Lavater is praised as having succeeded even over the most disbelieving people who had doubted the fact that the human face was a reliable display of the human heart (see Graham 564). Regardless of the great controversy that it provoked, Lavater’s work is still be regarded as one of the most important writings in the field and attained enormous popularity. Graham even asserts that “[t]he book [Physiognomische Fragmente] was reprinted, abridged, summarized, pirated, parodied, imitated, and reviewed so often that it is difficult to imagine how a literate person of the time could have failed to have some general knowledge of the man [Lavater] and his theories” (Graham 562). Lavater’s importance in public discourse was not, as might be deduced from the collection of quotations above, restricted to journalistic contributions. Various encyclopaediae published in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century offer an entry on *physiognomy*, each of these entries acknowledging Lavater as the key figure of modern physiognomy (see Graham 571-572). Although Brontë does not explicitly refer to Lavater in her novels, his enormous popularity at the time of her writing certainly justifies the assumption that she was at least aware of the existence of his theories and publications. To what degree Lavater’s influence might be traced in her writings will be shown in subsequent chapters.

Most of the quotations that have been presented so far date back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and might seem antiquated and naïve if read

against the background of a 21<sup>st</sup> century scientific standard of knowledge. It might be all the more interesting to make a short remark that physiognomy is still being applied, and is regarded as a relevant factor in the public discourse of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, e.g. by Werner Wolf who wrote in 2002: “Man könnte aber genauso gut auch auf Fernsehwerbung, Western oder Politikerporträts auf Wahlplakaten verweisen (wobei, wie sehr oft, Physiognomie mit Pathognomie gemeinsam eingesetzt wird): Überall wird uns suggeriert, dass der äußere Anschein auf innere Qualitäten verweist“ (Wolf, “Gesichter in der Erzählkunst“ 303). In his article Wolf gives an explicit example from the Walt Disney movie *The Rescuers* (ibid. 202) and it would be easy to enumerate many more movies, where it is made very obvious for the viewer who is good or bad. The fact that these mechanisms of physiognomic (and pathognomic) characterisation are still employed successfully, despite their doubtful scientific status, makes it problematic to dismiss the practice as something totally antiquated or out-dated.

Literary physiognomic descriptions have been explained to be windows to the characters’ souls, and very often support the idea of a readable reality. This practice is sometimes assumed to have enjoyed its heyday in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, although traces of it are still found in the present. The next chapter will contain a closer investigation of the history of physiognomy, including a short account of its origins, which are to be sought in the ancient world.

## **2.2 Influences and origins**

It was assumed by Fülleborn (1796), a philologist from Breslau, that Pythagoras was the initiator of the formal study of physiognomy, although Galen assumes that Hippocrates “was the first to establish [physiognomy] as a science” (qut. inTytler 36). It is difficult to identify the exact point in time when physiognomy as a science was born, nevertheless Fülleborn’s investigation into the history of physiognomy leaves no doubt to the fact that physiognomy is rooted in the ancient world. The considerable popularity of physiognomy in ancient Greece is also well-illustrated by the fact that both philosophers mentioned above “owe their fame to a few general comments they made on the necessity of physiognomy” (Tytler 36). Evidently J.C. Lavater was not the first to establish physiognomy as a science, but rather revived it and widened its mass appeal.

The term “Szientifizierungsschub” that was discussed in the previous section should therefore not be misinterpreted as denoting the creation of sciences that had not existed prior to 1800, but rather as the introduction of mathematical parameters as determining for all sciences. As Lavater was ambitiously trying to satisfy these newly introduced preconditions to transform physiognomy into an acknowledged science, he is sometimes referred to as the inventor of the modern science of physiognomy. His effort in that realm was, however, viewed very critically by many writers and philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was Fülleborn who wrote in 1797 that he was not sure whether the endeavour of elevating physiognomy to the realm of science had been successful or not, and similarly doubtful and even mocking comments on the “science” of physiognomy can also be found in the writings of numerous others. Louis Chevalier de Jacourt, one of the authors of the *Encyclopédie*, designated it as a “science imaginaire”, while Hegel qualified the attempt to transform physiognomy into a science as being an endless and aimless one (qut. in Aburg 41). Leaving aside the fact that physiognomy’s status as a science has always been highly controversial, it was certainly treated as such by numerous people in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the analysis of 19<sup>th</sup> century novels as to their use of and reliance on physiognomy therefore seems an interesting and relevant endeavour. In the subsequent sections some of the most important figures throughout the history of physiognomy and important influences from other fields of psychology will be presented in chronological order as to convey a fully-fledged representation of the issue throughout history.

### 2.2.1 Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC)

Tytler identifies Aristotle as “the most important historical figure in classical physiognomy” (36), although not the first to investigate into physiognomy, as in his *Physiognomonica* (300BC), he refers back to earlier works on that subject. His interest in physiognomy is also noticeable in some of his other writings. Aristotle was very carefully sorting and tabulating physiognomic features, which leads Tytler to the assumption that his findings might have been regarded as scientifically valuable at his time. Aristotle’s *Physiognomonica* is widely regarded as having been the standard work on physiognomy prior to the time of Lavater. His theory was mainly based on the comparison of animal features and human

features, and amongst the best-known are probably the equation of lion and masculinity and of panther and femininity (Tytler 36-38).

### 2.2.2 Giambattista della Porta (1535-1615)

Physiognomy did not, however, disappear from public awareness after the time of Aristotle's writing. Giambattista della Porta, the Italian natural scientist and dramatist, wrote one of the most crucial books on the topic of physiognomy before Lavater, the *De Humana Physiognomica* (1586). Lavater's reaction to della Porta's book, which is regarded as being among the most significant books imparting and preserving knowledge about medieval natural philosophy, can be said to be ambivalent:

Lavater greatly admired Giambattista della Porta as an author, but he commented on, criticised and finally disproved parts of his work. Evidence of his agreement with some of della Porta's theories is provided by the fact that Lavater directly quoted from the *De Humana Physiognomica* in his first edition, describing the looks of "just and unjust persons", of "villains and poisoners" (see Jatón 65). A reason for this is again sought not only in personal and professional admiration, but in his search for a scientific tradition for his doctrine. The book by della Porta that is mentioned and discussed in Lavater's *Fragmente* is based on the similarities between humans and animals and the explanations given in the book are illustrated with wood-carved pictures, so-called xylographies, (von Arburg 44). Della Porta developed a psychology of humans and animals, and came up with numerous similarities, between "incautious people and donkeys", "coarse and raw people and pigs" or "insane people and monkeys" (Jatón, 65). Lavater entitles a whole chapter "Menschen und Thiere [sic]" ("Humans and Animals"), and dedicates this chapter to revealing the weaknesses of della Porta's and Aristotle's work, as he says that they saw similarities where there were none, and overlooked those that were most obvious (Lavater, *Phys. Fragm.* 287). By revising older sources treating the topic of physiognomy, Lavater tried to find support for his theory, and by revealing new perspectives and making corrections, he developed his own system of physiognomy.

### 2.2.3 Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828)

Franz Joseph Gall, a physician and brain researcher, is interesting in so far as his science is closely related to physiognomy. Both disciplines aim at revealing a person's character by analysing his/her facial features. Gall is the founding father of the principle of "phrenology" or "cranioscopy", which is based on a parallelism between the shape of a person's skull and his/her character. What was probably his most ground-breaking idea was that of the "Gehirnlokalisationslehre". He tried to recognize how strongly or weakly developed certain parts of the brain were from cavities or flat areas in the surface of the skull. As he ascribed each part of the brain certain functions, he deduced from their size certain character traits, abilities or the absence of these. As Gall was one of the first to do research in that field, he had no established doctrine, on which he could rely as a starting point. Buttkus argues that this is why his work remained incomplete.

Although, phrenology may seem a "pseudo-science" from the point of view of a reader in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is amazing that Gall managed to define the localisation of the speech area (later called Broca's area after the French physician Broca) in the brain, which was later affirmed in modern medicine (Buttkus, 14-16). It will be shown in later analyses that knowledge of phrenology was sometimes used as a basis for the reading of faces in Brontë's novels.

### 2.2.4 Physiognomy and Pathognomy

The introduction to physiognomy and the application of the principle in the analysis of literary passages renders necessary a close investigation of a similar, related, and partly even overlapping concept that ties in with physiognomy: pathognomy. This section will be dedicated to the comparison of these two related concepts and the degree of overlap that might be essential to know about in the course of my analysis.

"Pathognomy" is defined as follows: "Die Untersuchung z.B. von Gefühlen auf der Grundlage von Gesichtsausdruck und Körperbewegungen" (Arnold et al). Many recent studies of the 20th and 21st century are based on the idea of reading facial expressions (pathognomic expressions), which is partly done

independently from cultural background or context as it has been revealed that certain facial expressions can be interpreted unambiguously throughout various cultural contexts and do not necessarily have to be contextualised to be understood properly (see Wierzbicka 151). Although no longer termed “pathognomic analysis”, the phenomenon as such is still scientifically observed (cf. a study by Wierzbicka from 2000 entitled “The semantics of human facial expressions”).

In the two Brontë novels that will be examined, however, most pathognomic expressions are contextualised immediately and both heroines make use of their situational knowledge, as for instance in: “irritated pride did not lower the expression of her haughty lineaments” (JE 221), where Jane Eyre might think to see irritated pride because she presumes the person to feel that way. A similar example can be found in *Villette* where Lucy Snowe’s interpretation of the girl’s eyes revealing languid suffering is not only due to her physiognomic (or pathognomic) competence, but probably relies as much on her knowledge of the girl’s injury and previous unconsciousness: “the eyes were a rich gift of nature fine and full, large, deep, seeming to hold dominion over the slighter subordinate features – capable, probably, of much significance at another hour and under other circumstances than the present, but now languid and suffering” (V 264). Both heroines rely on the context when interpreting facial expressions, because they are normally interpreting persons in their close surroundings, whom they know very well, and with whom they are often in direct social interaction when they become the subjects of the heroines’ physiognomic readings.

Lavater himself does mention pathognomy in his “Essays on Physiognomy” and contrasts it with physiognomy: “Physiognomy is properly distinguished from pathognomy. Physiognomy, opposed to pathognomy, is the knowledge of the signs of the powers and inclinations of men. Pathognomy is the knowledge of the signs of the passions” (Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy* 20). Although clearly distinguishable from physiognomy, pathognomy does play a role within physiognomy in the sense that conscious or unconscious facial expressions were seen to contribute to the formation of certain features that might then be



interpreted following physiognomic schemata. One example from the relevant primary literature would be the description of M. Paul in “Villette”, in which “the swell of wrath, scorn, resolve – passed over his brow, rippled his lips and lined his cheeks (340)”. It might be such pathognomic movements of the face that lead to the physiognomic reading of his “brow marked and square, his mouth no rosebud”, which according to Lucy Snowe evokes in a spectator “the reverse of damping or insignificant” (V338). Also Mr Rochester’s “firm, grim mouth” (JE 173-174) can be assumed to look like that because of repeated expressions of firmness or grimness, just as one of the lady’s “gentle face” might be due to a lack of angry or grim facial expressions. Such conclusions illustrate well that pathognomy and physiognomy, correspond in some respects, although they differ in method.

### 2.3 Three basic principles

Although Lavater’s reasoning seems rather opaque and dubious at some points, the illustration of the three principles on which his thesis is based proves useful to understand the line of thought that served as a background for the development of his theories.

“Kontinuität” (continuity): The principle of “Kontinuität” can best be put in a nutshell with the help of Leibniz’ sentence “Natura non facit saltum” (qut. in Züst 3) which translates as “Nature does not make jumps”, meaning that every natural being or object undergoes gradual development and this process of development can be traced back and forth as it is always linear and does not involve any inconsistencies or jumps. Züst (3) assumes that Lavater took over this principle from Leibniz, who is regarded as having had great influence on Lavater’s work. Another important feature of the principle of continuity is that of great attention to detail, as the principle assumes that conclusions can be drawn from the smallest part of a whole to the whole. The understanding of a whole body, e.g. is believed to be found in the separate body parts, or as expressed in Lavater’s own words: “Every minute part has the nature and character of the whole. ...Each trait contains the whole character of man, as in the smallest works of God the character of Deity is contained” (qut. in Graham 563).

“Individualität” (individuality): “Every individual differs from another individual in appearance” (see Jatón 72), or as Holcroft translated from Lavater’s original: “Each man is an individual self, with as little ability to become another self as to become an angel” (qut. in Graham 563). This assertion, however, evoked criticism, as the strong focus on the uniqueness of the individual was seen as a contradiction to the creation of physiognomic laws and rules classifying people according to their appearance (see Jatón 73). This idea of individuality is classified as “Leibniz’ thought” by Buttkus, and assumed to follow the model of Leibniz’ principle “des Nichtunterscheidbaren” (“of the indistinguishable”) (ibid. 72).

“Homogenität” (homogeneity): The third principle can in some way be seen as a restriction to the principle of individuality, as nature allows only a limited number of combinations in its striving for the creation of homogenous creatures (Jatón 73). This would mean that nature as the creating force restricts itself, because it can only combine features with each other that finally make up a homogenous being. Lavater’s explanation of the concept reads as follows: “The finger of one body is not adapted to the hand of another body. Each part of an organized body is an image of the whole, has the character of the blood in the heart. The same congeniality is found in the nerves, in the bones” (qut. in Graham 563).

#### **2.4 Beauty in Lavater’s Physiognomy = Beauty in Brontë?**

‘You are a beauty in my eyes [...]’ ‘I don’t call you handsome, sir, though I love you most dearly [...]’ (257-258).

The above lines are part of a dialogue between Mr Rochester and Jane Eyre in which he declares that she is a beauty to him, and her reaction is very honest as she says that she loves him despite his lack of beauty. This quotation is one of many in which Brontë mentions beauty explicitly, and it will occur to the attentive reader that the conception of beauty that she presents in her novels is rather more complex than the assertion that outward beauty is the result of moral actions. Rochester’s flaws of appearance do not mislead Jane to the assumption that he might be a morally degraded person.

An investigation of Lavater's perception of beauty in physiognomy will reveal that his notion of beauty heavily relies on the parallelism of outward and inward beauty. However, the topic becomes more complex when one consults Lavater's writings and compares them to the writings preceding, as well as to those following his own. To begin with, it is essential note the great controversy that the hypothetical equation of outward and inward beauty has evoked since the time of physiognomy's origins in ancient Greece. Sokrates was regarded as being himself a contradiction to this equation, as he was an example of a beautiful soul inhabiting an ugly body. (see von Arburg 43)

Lavater's "Gesetz der Entsprechung" (law of correspondence) also became a stumbling stone for other researchers in the field of physiognomy, and Lavater moderated his law of correspondence by explaining why it is not always possible to assume a parallelism between outside and inside as there are other influences on one's outer appearance than vice and virtue:

I only affirm virtue beautifies, vice deforms. I do not maintain that virtue is the sole cause of human beauty, or vice of deformity; such doctrine would be absurd. Who can pretend there are not other, more immediate causes of the beauty or deformity of the countenance? [...] (Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy* I 184)

Another moderation of Lavater's "Gesetz der Entsprechung" ("law of correspondence") is given in Buttkus nearly 200 years later. Beauty is by no means always a sign of genius and he even goes so far as to assert talented able people seldomly fit into the broadly accepted ideal of beauty.

„Dem landläufigen Schönheitsbegriff entsprechen die meisten begabten Menschen nicht, aber das Gesicht ist von der Flamme des lebendigen Geistes durchstrahlt, und den Händen sieht man an, daß (sic) sie nicht nur Greifwerkzeuge sind. Dagegen ist das Mittelmaß, ja selbst die geistige Primitivität (die ja in allen Schichten zu finden ist), zuweilen in eine sehr ansprechende, vor allem erotisch sehr anziehende „Fleischschönheit“ gekleidet.“ (Buttkus 42)

This remark by Buttkus seems to be very closely related to Lavater's confession that his method of reading shades of people is limited as "[all] cannot be seen in a shade [...] the figure, elasticity, fire, power, motion, life, in the nose, mouth, eye [cannot]" (Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy* I 114).

The presence or absence of Lavater's "fire, power, motion" or Buttkus' "Flamme des lebendigen Geistes" can be traced in Brontë's texts several times. However, different vocabulary is used, as in "[...] but Mary was deficient in life: her face lacked **expression**; her eye **lustre**; she had nothing to say, and having once taken her seat, remained fixed like a statue in its niche [...] but he shares Mary's **apathetic** and **listless look**" (JE 172).

Mr Mason, who turns up at one of Mr Rochester's dinner parties, is described as follows: "His features were regular, but too **relaxed**: his eye was large and well cut, but the life looking out of it was a **tame, vacant life** – at least so I thought. [...] But I liked his physiognomy even less than before: it struck me as being at the same time unsettled and **inanimate**. [...] there was **no power** in that smooth-skinned face of a full oval shape; **no firmness** in that aquiline forehead; **no command** in that blank, brown eye (JE 189).

Lord Ingram is another good example of a handsome character who fails to please due to a lack of power and energy. The feature that reveals Lord Ingram's character is his length of limb and Jane thinks to know that this is a sign of his brain being not very vigorous and his blood lacking vivacity: "Lord Ingram, like his sisters, is very tall; like them, also, he is handsome; but he shares Mary's **apathetic** and **listless** look: he seems to have more length of limb than **vivacity** of blood or **vigour** of brain" (JE 173).

In her writing, Brontë often refers to what Lavater describes as physiognomy which is "independent of the motion of the muscles, the fire of the eyes, of complexion, gesture and attitude; independent of speech and action" (Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy* I 294), but additionally she observes what cannot be seen in an unanimated countenance, which adds another dimension to her character descriptions and facilitates the reader's act of forming a complete and true-to-life picture in his/her head.

Another aspect that becomes relevant at this point, is the notion that "beauty lies in the eye of the beholder" as stated by Brontë's heroines. This leads to the assumption that beauty is not regarded as an objective concept in these two novels by Brontë. I chose three quotations to illustrate my point: "What contradictory attributes of character we sometimes find ascribed to us, according to the eye with which we are viewed!" (V301). Not only does beauty lie in the eye of the beholder, but the eye also reveals and interprets attributes of character, implying that good character traits might also show outwardly in features that are not regarded as especially beautiful by the observer.

Most true it is that 'beauty is in the eye of the gazer'. My master's colourless, olive face, square, massive brow, broad and jetty eyebrows, deep eyes, strong features, firm, grim mouth – all energy, decision, will – were not beautiful, according to rule; but they were more than beautiful to me [...] 'He is not to them what he is to me' (JE 173-174).

Her personal appearance was far from destitute of advantages; I believe many people would have pronounced her "a fine woman;" and yet there were points in her robust and ample attractions, as well as in her bustling and demonstrative presence, which, it appeared, the nice and capricious tastes of M. Paul could not away with (V348).

In the above quotations, it should become clear that the notion of beauty can indeed differ from character to character and is not treated as an ultimate or easily measurable parameter. The great importance of subjectivity and personal opinion on the side of the spectator is not explicitly stated in Lavater's work, but his analyses are always based on the perspective of the physiognomist, the one who is reading the face, and this is normally he himself. Whether a face is ugly or beautiful is always decided by the physiognomist on the ground of subjectively perceived features, which could indeed leave a different or even contrary impression on another spectator.

Lavater's idea of beauty being an outward sign of a good character is seemingly complicated by the fact that Brontë rejects beauty as an ultimate parameter, but rather exposes the concept as being negotiable and experienced and evaluated differently by different people. In the following quotation which is assumed to have originally been uttered by the author herself, she argues against Lavater's

law of correspondence that was described above. In a way, her concept of beauty can be seen as being literally opposed to Lavater's.

[Charlotte Brontë] told her sisters that they were wrong – even morally wrong - in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting on any other terms. Her answer was, 'I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours. (Martineau qut. in Jack 384)

The fact that the main characters, who are models of virtue and goodness, are explicitly described as being „plain“ and „not beautiful“ can be seen as a plea against Lavater's original equation of "good = beautiful". Blanche Ingram, for example, who turns out to be a superficial, plain character, is described as being beautiful above average. For closer examination and more illustration of this phenomenon, see chapter 7.3.

### **3 Physiognomic descriptions in the novel**

This chapter will start out by investigating the process of reading and "recognising the literary piece of art" (*Vom Erkennen des Literarischen Kunstwerks*) which is the title of Ingarden's book in which he makes a close examination of the processes that play a role when a reader gets to know a book on its various levels. This process of recognition will be focussed on because it offers interesting insights into how it is possible to understand and process physiognomic descriptions as will be analysed in subsequent chapters. The titles of the subsection in this paper are translations from Ingarden's chapter titles.

#### **3.1 "The recognition of the literary piece of art"**

##### **3.1.1 The levels of reading and recognition**

The first step in the recognition of a novel is termed "Das Erfassen der Schriftzeichen und der Wortlaute" ("The recognition of signs and words"), and although this might seem very simple and obvious, Ingarden dedicated four pages to the description of this process. His main assumption is that the reader who reads a book in a language he knows very well will automatically perceive certain signs and words as expressions, as carriers of meaning, and that certain

meanings might be emotionally laden by the reader. Furthermore the reader, even if he/she reads silently, will imagine the actual sound of the words and sentences, and be able to recognize the eventual rhythm of the text. Ingarden assumes that each book possesses a level of sound, that it has its own music which accompanies the situations described, and the reader should be sensitive of certain peculiarities occurring on that level because their sound is perceivable in the whole novel (see Ingarden 16-21).

### 3.1.2 The understanding of word meanings and sentences

The main argument in this section is that each word is inscribed a meaning and that this inscription can result in misinterpretations, as not all words are used unambiguously. The inscription of meaning happens individually, and might result in different interpretations, although there is a common agreement on many meanings to such a degree that a text is intelligible to a majority of readers. The reason for this is that words are normally not regarded in isolation, but are naturally parts of a language system, and the meaning of words as components of this system is normally negotiated inter-subjectively, not privately. The actual understanding of text passages is related to the actualisation of the intention, meaning that the reader adopts the author's intention and assimilates his line of thought to the intended meaning. This perception of meaning makes the reading process dynamic and enables a fluent reading experience during which the reader moves from sentence to sentence (see Ingarden 21-35). This level of perception is important in the visualisation of physiognomic descriptions, because it relies on the reader's individual interpretation of an intended meaning. The meaning might not be detected properly, and therefore the author's original message might be changed in this process.

### 3.1.3 Active and passive reading

The next passage concentrates on the distinction between active and passive reading, which are different processes with regards to the final recognition of described items. Although the process of passive reading does require a certain reader activity, it differs from active reading in so far as it does enable the reader

to understand and see the objects that are described, but only the active reading process allows the reader to experience and discover the fictional objects in full detail and to understand their characteristic structure. The analyses that will be presented in chapters five to seven do all assume an active reader as certain methods can only trigger various effects and fulfil functions if the reader participates in the reading process actively (see Ingarden 35-40).

#### 3.1.4 Objectification as transition from meanings to depicted objects

Objectification which is described as the actual transformation of intended meanings into literary objects is achieved by putting sentences in a row which have certain “Intentionalitätsfunktion[en]” (“intentional functions”), and correlate with each other causally. This results in the reader getting to know the object in more and more detail and making speculations about the object’s further development and involvement in the story. During the active reading process, the reader will repeatedly objectify the intended meanings, and by this construct a world containing things, people, events, and an emotional atmosphere. The nature of the newly created world depends on the reader in that sense that the process of objectification can always be done in various ways. There is no implicit rule that clearly guides the reader into one or the other direction, and the full potential of objectification is hardly ever exploited while reading. There is also the possibility of reflexively objectifying certain sentences after finishing the reading, and generally the objectification might differ from reader to reader and from one reading to the next. When the active reader fulfils the process of objectification, he/she should be able to understand everything that happens and exists in the literary world.

The process of objectification makes the objects and persons exist independently from the intentional meanings, and this is achieved if the reader manages to reach a synthesising objectification in which the details are accumulated and combined to create a unified whole. The effect for the reader is that he/she acts as active constructor of the world, and can therefore react to it more emotionally and evaluative as if the whole construct was only presented to him/her (see Ingarden 40-49). The impression of being an active constructor



of and emotional participator in the fictional world can be regarded as being closely related to reader immersion as described in section 7.1.

### 3.1.5 The concretion of the depicted objects

To understand the act of concretion it has to be clarified that the novel is regarded as a schematic construct, consisting of various layers. Each of these layers, especially the layer of objects as described in the previous section is marked by a number of “Unbestimmtheitsstellen”, gaps that the reader has to fill. A typical example of this phenomenon is the fact that hardly any character is described from his birth to his death, but the author is likely to concentrate on a certain phase in a character’s life, which leaves the other phases undetermined. The creative and individual filling of these gaps which the reader does consciously and unconsciously, and always according to his sense of reality, and his attitude towards it enhances the act of concretisation. What has been objectified is now completed and thereby made concrete. An example of this is the theatrical performance in which an actor plays the part of a character that has originally been described in written form, and thereby makes him/her appear more concrete and maybe more interesting and deep.

The question whether a certain concretion is adequate, and how this can properly be evaluated, is dependent on the historical context in which a literary piece of art is read and interpreted. The dependence on the cultural atmosphere of a certain epoch is limited, though, and a book will keep a certain existence and identity, even if it lives through different eras (Ingarden 49-55). The function of these gaps that are left for the reader to fill from his/her imaginative capacities will be discussed from a different perspective in section 3.3.

### 3.1.6 Actualisation and concretion of “Ansichten”

In this section, Ingarden states that there are adequate and inadequate perceptions of literary pieces of art. The depictions described in the novel are created by actually experiencing them imaginatively. If successfully actualised, they transcend the level of thought, and appear in the lively imagination of the

reader. The visualisation of literary objects is compared to a contact which the reader makes with the written medium. When the reader is in contact with the text, he/she can decide which components of it are most interesting for him/her to actualise, to visualise. Some texts, however, try to force certain visual components onto their readers, and by this suggestive power they urge the reader to actualise a certain surrounding. Texts of this kind are more likely to be reconstructed more truthfully than those who suggest the possible sensual impressions rather vaguely.

The adequate perception and recognition of the literary piece of art requires the nearly synchronous fulfilment of all the processes mentioned in the previous paragraphs, and this requirement can sometimes not be fulfilled properly, as will be illustrated in the subsequent section (Ingarden 55-63).

### **3.2 Problems and shortcomings of physiognomic descriptions in the novel**

The purpose of the following chapter is to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the medium of writing puts certain limitations to physiognomic descriptions which are grounded in a "technical limitation of the method" (Irwin 18). In a novel without illustrations, faces cannot be shown unmediated, but the author has to make use of words.

#### **3.2.1 Fragmented and incomplete reading experience**

If the reader is for some reason unable to cope with the manifold influences and expressions that he meets during his/her reading experience some details might not be fully constituted or not constituted at all. Other aspects might be constituted in too great detail which might contort the novel. Lack of concentration and the unequal devotion to certain aspects from the side of the reader are regarded as further factors that influence the perception of literary descriptions. The result of this is what Ingarden calls "perspektivische Verkürzung" ("perspective contraction"). There are two different types of this perspective contraction: Either the reader uses syntax and certain meaning correlations on the syntactic level as merely transitional objects, and mainly concentrates on the objects, or the reader mainly focuses on the language,

expression, vocabulary. Both contractions ultimately lead to a contorted perception of the novel.

### 3.2.2 Static, linear, long, mediated

Naturally, authors of written texts are bound to the use of written language when describing persons or settings and therefore narrative descriptions of any kind will always be static to some degree. Irwin identifies this feature as a reason why “comprehensive physical portrayal, [...], is absent from the work of some of the best nineteenth-century novelists and has virtually disappeared from serious fiction [in the 20<sup>th</sup>] century” (ibid. 18). By putting a real event into written words, it has to be made static, because in a way one could argue that as soon as a real life event is put into letters and written onto a page, it changes from dynamic to static. The effect of texts being written in a “lively” or “dynamic” way, as the experienced reader might certainly perceive it in some cases, is only achieved by skilfully combining these static descriptions. In comparison to that, mediums such as film or drama make use of animated representations.<sup>1</sup>

In novels, not only static faces or landscapes are represented in the static - inanimate- medium of the written text, also dynamic processes have to be encoded with the means of written language. Although an author might describe the sea as being “stormy and rough”, the letters of these words are not dynamic or imitating the expressed motion in any way, they are just arbitrary static signs. There are of course exceptions to that, as e.g. concrete poetry, in which the form and composition of the lines often resemble the content of the poem.

Another boundary which cannot be transgressed is that of linearity. A text can only describe events in succession while a picture, movie or theatre play might be able to transport various messages and impressions at the same time. Although the plot of a story might not be linear in the sense of chronologically ordered, it still has to be written in a linear manner, meaning that the writer strictly follows the structure of one line after the other, and only one story can be told at a time. As a consequence, each text and each paragraph has a beginning and an end, and this strict linear order might restrict the reader's

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lessing's Laokoon 1766

freedom of mentally structuring its components according to his/her own understanding. The reader is presented with the description of certain features in the order that the author has fixed when writing while the viewer of a picture can certainly regard and evaluate the components of the picture according to his/her own taste.

A problem that is closely connected to that of linearity is that of length. A scene that might actually last some seconds can be described – encoded - on 10 pages, leaving a huge discrepancy between narrated time and narrating time. Classifying this as a problem might go too far, but in fact, the lack of immediacy that might be the consequence of scenes or images circumscribed in great detail, and therefore great length, might result in the reader experiencing the description as rather fragmented. Irwin describes this phenomenon as follows: “the longer the description the less the likelihood that the reader will fuse its successive elements into a single apprehension” (20). Later in his book, Irwin asks whether “even if all these details are true to life and meaningful, do they hold enough meaning to justify the large number of words necessary to describe them?”, and he answers his own question: “Many an actual gesture that communicates a good deal can only be represented verbally at a length disproportionate both to its importance and to the length of time it takes to enact” (49).

The last point discussed in this sub-chapter is that of “Mediatisierung” (mediation) described in Wolf as follows: “[...] das narrative Wahrnehmungsobjekt [ist], anders als ein lebensweltlich beobachtbares, nicht unmittelbar gegeben [...], sondern mediatisiert, d.h. über ein Zeichensystem vermittelt [...]“ (Wolf 306). In a next step, Wolf draws the reader’s attention towards the fact that the reader of a narrative portrait can never be provided with a sensual perception of the narrative figure, as would be the case in the perception of a real-life face. This symbolic encoding and decoding of visual information is the reason why the physiognomy of a narrative character always is the “Resultat eines Konkretisierungsaktes in [der] Imagination [des Lesers]” (306) which implies that the reader achieves an “imaginäre Wahrnehmung” (“imaginary perception”), which is contrasted with the “echte Wahrnehmung”

(“real perception”). Any inconsistencies that occur in the course of the reader’s act of decoding the author’s encoded facial description might therefore cause a widening of the gap between reader and fictional world, and might therefore hinder or hamper reader immersion, which can shortly be defined as the reader’s mental state of being drawn into the story of a book, to actually be inside the fictional world.

One interesting approach to the solution of the various problems that can occur in the creation of a (literary) portrait can be extracted from Gombrich’s theory of the etc. principle, which will be presented in the subsequent section. It will give an account of the requirements that successful literary portraits have to fulfil from a viewpoint of cognitive psychology in order to successfully exert the functions intended by the author. Chapter 3 provides a theoretical prelude to chapters 4, 5, and 6, which will partly be based on the cognitive theories presented so far.

### **3.3 Gombrich’s etc. principle**

In his book “Art and Illusion” Gombrich concentrates on the analysis of pictorial art from a psychological perspective. His work is, however, also relevant for the analysis of physiognomic descriptions, which are in fact pictures, but pictures that are mediated via language as already elucidated in the previous section. Gombrich himself describes the etc. principle as “the assumption we tend to make that to see a few members of a series is to see them all” (Gombrich 221). So far, this is not necessarily a weakness or shortcoming, but rather an assumption from the field of cognitive psychology. However, Gombrich’s principle implies that the reader (or in Gombrich’s original description the viewer) tends to automatically complete the picture he sees according to his/her own knowledge. In the course of Gombrich’s text he claims that “all communication consists in “making concessions to the recipient’s knowledge” and that “the beholder’s identification with the artist must find its counterpart in the artist’s identification with the beholder” (Gombrich 233-234). Wolf extends Gombrich’s model by saying that the reception of narrated facts like physiognomic descriptions even requires greater cooperation of the recipient (in this case, the reader) than does, for instance, reception that is mediated by

pictures (Übersetzung Wolf 307). Taking into account Wolf's perspective, it might be argued, that the requirement of greater cooperation from the side of the reader is a shortcoming of the narrative medium.

The general question when writing a text is how much detail the author must provide for the reader so that he/she can decode the message "correctly", meaning that he/she understands what the writer encoded. A theory that is related to Gombrich's principle as it also deals with a typical feature of narrative texts is Ingarden's theory of "Unbestimmtheitsstellen". (qut. in Wolf 307) These gaps arouse the necessity for the reader to fill them from the source of his own imagination while the beholder of a picture or another real-life object could fill such "gaps" by observing the object more closely. These gaps have to fulfil two conditions: The first would be that the reader must know how to fill these gaps (so that he can fulfil the act of concretion) with the help of his "mental set" (see Wolf, "GDE" 306-308). The mental set "comprises the attitudes and expectations which will influence our perceptions and make us ready to see, or hear, one thing rather than another (Gombrich 186) and might be comparable to Wolf's concept of "scripts" or "Schemata" (Wolf, "GDE" 308) as he calls it. The second condition is the availability of a mental screen which the reader uses as platforms of projection. As the reader fills his gaps with information from his own imagination, he projects pictures into these gaps, which are used as mental screens for projections. The "screen" as such is described in Gombrich as "an empty field in which nothing contradicts our anticipation" (Gombrich 228).

Reasonable as this may seem, it is still open to interpretation, at what point a reader will know enough details as to know how to fill the remaining gaps. Similarly, the screen onto which mental pictures can be projected will differ from reader to reader.

#### **4 Brontë's descriptions – Jane Eyre**

At first, the reader will be provided with a short plot summary, in which the characters and their relationships will be described. The reader will be introduced to the plot line and the role that various characters come to play within the story, which will help to contextualise the quotations analysed in subsequent sections. It will be the aim of the following chapter to reveal

recurring patterns and methods that are applied when describing characters in *Jane Eyre*, because it is essential to find out which features exactly are described and how they are described, to have a starting point for later analysis.

#### **4.1 Plot summary**

*Jane Eyre* tells the story of a girl who is sent to live with her aunt, Mrs. Reed, after her parents' death. From the beginning on she is condemned to live a miserable life at Gateshead as not only does her aunt detest her but her stepsiblings constantly bully the young Jane. She is then sent to Lowood, a boarding school for girls, where she meets Helen Burns who becomes her first and best friend, however, unfortunately dies from a lethal illness soon after their meeting. After many years of hunger, cold, and hardship she grows up to become a teacher at Lowood and finally finds the courage to apply for a job as a governess in Thornfield Hall where she becomes employee to Mr Rochester and takes care of his ward, Adele Varens. At Thornfield Hall Jane Eyre meets Blanche Ingram who she thinks to be the future wife of Mr Rochester. One day Jane gets the message of her aunt being lethally ill and goes to Gateshead to attend her aunt. Mrs Reed hands her a letter of Jane's uncle, which is dated some years back, in which he asks Jane to come and live with him. Mrs. Reed admits that she has informed him that Jane had died of fever. Soon after this revelation, Mrs. Reed dies and Jane returns to Thornfield Hall, where after some time, Mr Rochester declares his love for her. When Mr Rochester asks Jane Eyre to marry him she happily agrees, but, unfortunately, their plans are crossed by Mr Mason who asserts that Mr Rochester is already married to Bertha Mason, his sister. Mr Rochester admits everything and leads Jane and Mr Mason to Bertha who lives in the attic of the house and is attended by the servant, Grace Poole. Mr Rochester begs Jane to stay but her pride and self-respect force her to leave Thornfield. She finds shelter at St. Johns' house and becomes acquainted with his two sisters Mary and Diane. St. John even finds her a position as a teacher. After some time he informs Jane of a heritage from her uncle John and it turns out that they are relatives. Soon after this revelation St. Johns tries to convince Jane to marry him on the grounds that she would make a good missionary's wife, but Jane refuses to marry out of reason. When she hears a voice calling her name one night, she feels that Mr Rochester needs her and returns to Thornfield Hall. She only finds a ruin there because

Bertha has burned down the house and killed herself by jumping off the roof of the building. Mr Rochester has been blinded by the flames, and their reunion and the birth of their first child are presented as the ultimate happy ending for Jane Eyre.

#### **4.2 Figure**

What is of interest is that one of the most described features is what Brontë calls “figure”. Adjectives used according with this feature are “good in the athletic sense of the term”, “square”, “flat”, “elegant”, and “slight”. Some of these are clearly positively connoted, others are clearly negative. Mr Rochester is athletic, a lady at Mr Rochester’s party is described as having an elegant figure and another lady is said to have a slight figure. Mrs Poole is described as having a square and flat figure. What might be a source of confusion is that Miss Ingram’s appearance is only described with adjectives denoting over-average beauty and elegance. It is revealed soon after the lady’s first appearance that the equation of “beautiful is good” does not prove correct in her case. The lady’s impression upon Jane Eyre is in fact very strong, because her beauty is mentioned repeatedly as in ‘[...] then appeared the magnificent figure of Miss Ingram’ (JE 182). Interestingly, the reader cannot say what exactly about these persons’ figures it is that evokes the impressions described above. However, I would argue, that these are instances where the reader can imagine figures that fit his/her own ideas of “elegance”, “squareness”, etc., which corresponds with Gombrich’s theory of the etc. principle according to which gaps are a necessary component within the reception process of a viewer (or a mediated reader).

#### **4.3 Head**

In Lavater’s Physiognomy, faces play an important role as is expressed by Buttkus:

Weil Kopf und Hand die vielfältigsten Unterscheidungsmöglichkeiten bieten, nehmen sie als Merkmalsträger die ersten Plätze in der Physiognomik ein. Durch ihre enge Verbindung zum Gehirn über ein besonders dichtes Netz feinsten Nerven und ihre Befähigung zu den mannigfaltigsten Leistungen sind sie die wichtigsten Vermittler zwischen Innen- und Außenwelt des Menschen. (Buttkus 42)



It can be assumed, that the emphasis on the analysis of heads and hands in physiognomic studies in general is a reason for Brontë's focus on heads. Interestingly, hands play a minor role. This might be the case because most analyses are made in secret and heads are easier to see and not so likely to be covered or hidden. There are, however, two explicit readings of characters' hands in *Villette* (see chapter 5). In *Jane Eyre*, the most important features are eyes, brows and hair. Normally, Brontë gives the colour and size and then adds characteristics that are presented as being logically entailed to the outer appearance.

#### 4.3.1 Mr Rochester

Mr Rochester's character seems to be manifested in his face. He is described to have "a dark face, with stern features and [a] heavy brow" (JE 115). His face is "masculine [...] dark, strong, and stern" (JE 117) "with his broad and jetty eyebrows, his square forehead, made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair" (JE 121). What is remarkable is that all his features, hair eyebrows and skin are marked by darkness. The importance of outer appearance and its analysis also becomes obvious in the phrase describing Mr Rochester's nose, mouth and jaw. "I recognized his decisive nose, more remarkable for character than beauty; his full nostrils, denoting, I thought, choler; his grim mouth, chin, and jaw – yes, all three were very grim, and no mistake" (JE 122). This is one of the instances where descriptions of appearances are clearly stated to be a key to the person's character traits. The nose instantly exposes him as a decisive character. His nostrils are identified as a sign of choler and something about Mr Rochester's mouth, chin and jaw evokes the association of grimness.

Jane Eyre is a very skilful painter and one day she sits down at Gateshead to draw a portrait. Although she does not intentionally or consciously draw a face she knows, it becomes more and more obvious whom the portrait will show in the end. The adjectives somehow lead the reader onto the right path. Full nostrils, a flexible looking mouth, a firm and decided chin and jetty hair can only belong to Edward Rochester. Jane deliberately leaves the eyes for the very end, because she thinks that they are most difficult to draw. This supports the assumption made above that eyes are of great importance with regard to physiognomic reading throughout the story. Obviously, the change of features

leads to a change of person and she has detailed ideas of how she wants her portrait to look. More force and spirit is simply achieved by using darker colours. The process of portraying Mr Rochester is illustrated in great detail and allows the conclusion that she does not only know the details of his face, but through that also the details of his character:

One morning I fell to sketching a face: what sort of a face it was to be, I did not care or know. [...] Soon I had traced on the paper a broad and prominent forehead and a square lower outline of visage: that contour gave me pleasure; my fingers proceeded actively to fill it with features. Strongly-marked horizontal eyebrows must be traced under that brow; then followed, naturally, a well-defined nose, with a straight ridge and full nostrils; then a flexible looking mouth, by no means narrow; then a firm chin, with a decided cleft down the middle of it; of course, some **black** whiskers were wanted, and some **jetty** hair, tufted on the temples, and waved above the forehead. Now for the eyes: I had left them to the last, because they required the most careful working. I drew them large; I shaped them well: the eyelashes I traced long and sombre; the iris lustrous and large. 'Good! But not quite the thing,' [...] 'he want more force and spirit'; and I wrought the shades **black**er, that the lights might flash more brilliantly – a happy touch or two secured success. There, I had a friend's face under my gaze. (JE 232)

In connection to the portrayal of Mr Rochester it is especially interesting that Lavater offers a theory on dark and light hair in his *Essays on Physiognomy II* where he asserts that "people with light hair, if not effeminate, are yet, it is well known, of tender formation and constitution. The chestnut, and iron grey, the black, and bay, are hardy" (183). This aspect is taken up by Irwin who discovers that "[d]escriptions of colouring often have more to do with temperament than with mere physical appearance. Heathcliff is necessarily dark; so are Murdstone, Rochester [...]. There is an obvious association between swarthy and a powerful, even oppressive, masculinity" (Irwin 25). Irwin identifies these simple stereotypical associations as quite shallow and contrived, but he argues that this simplicity might be the reason why these characters are likely to come "to life both visually and psychologically" (26). The physiognomy of Mr Rochester can be viewed as being a very reliable indicator of his character traits as all the adjectives connected to darkness, such as "stern", "grim" and "forceful", do in fact describe him very well.

Mr Rochester's "oppressive masculinity" is broken in the scene where he dresses up as a female gypsy which has been interpreted as a "semi-conscious effort to reduce this sexual advantage his masculinity gives him (by putting on a

woman's clothes he puts on a woman's weakness) [...]” (Gilbert and Gubar 355). The fact that he wears a woman's clothes and covers his hair and face erases his stern, grim appearance and Jane Eyre approaches the gypsy differently than she would approach Mr Rochester. The true character is not obvious to Jane Eyre because face and hair are veiled, and hinder a physiognomic reading.

#### 4.3.2 Jane Eyre

As Jane Eyre is the character who does most of the physiognomic readings, it is not surprising that the reader is mostly provided with descriptions of the other characters while the appearance of Jane Eyre is only described vaguely, and mostly by Mr Rochester who is guided by his romantic feelings towards her. He describes her as a character of perfect appearance, although his reliability is clearly doubtful, because he does not even know the colour of her eyes:

‘Jane, you look blooming, and smiling, and pretty, ’said he: ’truly pretty this morning. Is this my pale little elf? Is this my mustard-seed? This little sunny-faced girl with the dimpled cheek and rosy lips, the satin-smooth hazel hair, and the radiant hazel eyes?’ (I had green eyes, reader; but you must excuse the mistake; for him they were newdyed, I suppose.) (JE 257)

In Jane's brow he sees nobility, and he offers her to provide her with enough money and jewellery to do her nobility justice: “[...] for nature, at least, has stamped her patent of nobility on this brow, Jane; and I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings.[...]’You are a beauty in my eyes [...]” (257). This quotation supports the fact that Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester belong to different social classes with regard to material wealth, but that they are both noble with regard to appearance. This special focus on class differences and the new approach towards blurring class boundaries will be discussed in more detail in section 8.1. Other descriptions of Jane Eyre are given by herself and Mr Rochester as the gypsy woman and will be presented in the sub-sections 6.2 and 6.4, as they are most interesting to be analysed with a special focus on the methods applied..

#### 4.3.3 Blanche Ingram

The following quotation describes Lady Ingram: “olive complexion, dark and clear; noble features; eyes rather like Mr Rochester's, large and black, and as

brilliant as her jewels. And then she had such a fine head of hair, raven-black, and so becomingly arranged; a crown of thick plaits behind, and in front the longest, the glossiest curls I ever saw" (JE 159). Her description matches quite well what Irwin describes as "the dark ladies of fiction" who "are characteristically passionate, especially if they have a good deal of hair" (Irwin 25). It is not explicitly mentioned that Lady Ingram is passionate, but it is indeed emphasised that she is much admired "not only for her beauty, but for her accomplishments" (JE 159). She is a great singer, and Mr Rochester and Lady Ingram perform various duets in front of the assembled evening party, and they form a team when playing charade. It is in this scene that Blanche Ingram's flirtatious nature is revealed, although "passionate" would be too strong a word, as she cannot be described as behaving overtly so: "I see her incline her head towards him, till the jetty curls almost touch his shoulder and wave against his cheek; I hear their mutual whisperings; I recall their interchanged glances [...]" (JE 184).

The description of Lady Ingram is highly evaluative as it contains many adjectives and adverbs of manner. As with Lady Ingram's figure, her facial features are regarded by Jane as being beautiful. However, Lady Ingram's beauty cannot deceive Jane, as she soon discovers that "Her face was like her mother's; a youthful unfurrowed likeness: the same low brow, the same high features, the same pride: it was not, however, so saturnine a pride. She laughed continually: her laugh was satirical, and so was the habitual expression of her arched and haughty lip" (JE 171-172). What reveals Blanche Ingram's true nature is again a combination of her physiognomy, her mimic and the movements that she performs with her whole body. Although her lip is described as being arched and haughty the habitual expression that it carries might contribute just as much to Jane Eyre's evaluation of her. Another factor that influences Jane's opinion of her remarkably is her laugh, and Lavater also made a note on that when he discusses the assumption that "we must pay attention to the laugh" (Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy II* 263), if other features leave doubt about the true character of a person. He comments on this and concludes that "[i]f the laugh be good, so is the person" (ibid 263). So it can be

assumed that not only her face and its movements reveal her true character, but her satirical laugh is also a sign of that character trait in general.

#### 4.3.4 Old Lady Ingram

The dowager might be between forty and fifty: her teeth, too, were still apparently perfect. Most people would have termed her a splendid woman of her age: and so she was, no doubt, physically speaking; but then there was an expression of almost insupportable haughtiness in her bearing and countenance. She had Roman features and a double chin, disappearing into a throat like a pillar: these features appeared to me not only inflated and darkened but even furrowed with pride; and the chin was sustained by the same principle, in a position of almost preternatural erectness. She had, likewise, a fierce and hard eye: it reminded me of Mrs Reed's. (JE 171)

These lines describe Lady Ingram's mother. Here it becomes obvious that not everybody might have the ability to read faces correctly. Although, the lady would be called a "splendid woman of her age" by most people Jane can unveil the truth at a glance. Not only are her features "darkened and inflated", but they give away her pride. Here again, the eyes play an important role as they are described as fierce and hard and remind Jane of Mrs Reed's eyes. Mrs Reed is a negative and evil character from the beginning of the story till she dies. This comparison of Old Lady Ingram with old Mrs Reed might assume a certain similarity, not only in looks but also in character between the two women (see section 6.4 for a closer examination of that phenomenon).

#### 4.3.5 Mr Mason

The stranger that turns up at Thornfield Hall one evening is observed as quickly and accurately as the other characters. Jane has made up her mind about him after their first encounter, although they do not speak a lot. Again, she is the one who takes a closer look and is not deluded by some false first expression. What she makes clear is that she does not like his physiognomy and his way of life. Although his features are described as regular and he as a handsome and amiable-looking person, she does not feel any affection. She misses firmness and thinks to know that he leads a tame, vacant life. As will be shown in section 6.4, the source of this extreme dislike might also lie in the fact that he is so different from Mr Rochester, whom she idealises and adores.

The other ladies seem to be very affectionate towards Mr Mason and the reader might ascribe that to their lack of ability to read his features properly. As the reader is likely to identify with Jane Eyre, her analysis of Mr Mason is more trustworthy than that of the other ladies. What is interesting is that, independent of their abilities in that field, they do at once apply physiognomic analysis to his face. To one of them, Mr Mason embodies an ideal of charming, and Louisa reads in his forehead that he is a sweet-tempered person:

[...] they both called him ‘a beautiful man’. Louisa said he was ‘a love of a creature’, and she ‘adored him’; and Mary instanced his ‘pretty little mouth, and nice nose’, as her ideal of the charming. ‘And what a sweet-tempered forehead he has!’ cried Louisa; ‘so smooth – none of those frowning irregularities I dislike so much; and such a placid eye and smile!’” (JE 190)

This quotation illustrates, firstly, that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder and, secondly, that the reader’s decision about whom of the characters he/she can trust depends not so much on the physiognomic ability of the fictional characters or on the logical reasoning when describing other figures, but rather on the reader’s readiness to identify and sympathise with one or the other character. Although Jane Eyre is obviously influenced by her personal moods and feelings, the reader is more inclined to accept her opinions than those of other characters. The phenomenon of this close connection between reader and heroine will be discussed in section 6.1.

#### 4.3.6 The gentlemen

All the other gentlemen that appear on the party in this chapter will be described under one sub-heading because they are only mentioned very shortly and do not recur in the novel. Colonel Dent is compared to a soldier, but it does not become clear whether this refers to his clothes, his bearing or his behaviour, as it is just mentioned in one sentence: “Colonel Dent is a fine soldierly man” (JE 173). Mr Eshton is said to be gentleman-like and having the appearance of a “père noble de théâtre”. In this passage, Brontë uses this literary figure to describe Mr Eshton’s look and behaviour and therefore relies on the reader’s knowledge of that stereotypical figure. She employs a method which will be discussed under the sub-heading 6.3.1. “Mr Eshton, the magistrate of the district, is gentleman-like: his hair is quite white, his eyebrows and whiskers still

dark, which gives him something of the appearance of a 'père noble de théâtre'" (JE 173).

#### 4.3.7 The ladies

All the ladies that are described apart from those above will be included in this section as they only play a minor role in the story, and their descriptions can be summarised and analysed concisely. With Amy, face and manner are both childish. Louisa is said to be more elegant than her sister and having a face the French would call "minois chiffonné", which can be translated as "doll's face". The fact that both their faces are regular, smooth and ordinary might be an indicator for their characters being just as ordinary or flat as their appearances. At least, Jane cannot or does not want to read their bodies, with regard to their character qualities. Lady Lynn is large, stout, erect and haughty-looking. As with old Lady Ingram, haughtiness and erectness are features that seem to be interlinked:

First, there was Mrs Eshton and two of her daughters. She had evidently been a handsome woman, and was well preserved still. Of her daughters, the eldest, Amy, was rather little: naïve, and child-like, in face and manner, and piquant in form; her white muslin dress and blue sash became her well. The second, Louisa, was taller and more elegant in figure; with a very pretty face, of that order the French term *minois chiffonné*: both sisters were fair as lilies.

Lady Lynn was a large and stout personage of about forty, very erect, very haughty-looking, richly dressed in satin robe of changeful sheen: her dark hair shone glossily under the shade of an azure plume; and within the circlet of a band of germs. (JE 170-171)

The description of Mrs Colonel Dent as ladylike follows the rule that was identified by Irwin, namely that fair ladies in literature are "excessively feminine" (Irwin 25). This association described in Irwin's book does probably not occur to all readers and is dependent on social conventions at the time of reading as well as individual attitude of the reader: "Mrs Colonel Dent was less showy; but, I thought, more ladylike. She had a slight figure, a pale, gentle face, and fair hair. Her black satin dress, her scarf of rich foreign lace, and her pearl ornaments, pleased me better than the rainbow radiance of the titled dame" (JE 170-171).

#### 4.3.8 Bertha Mason

Bertha Mason, Mr Rochester's lunatic wife, can be said to stand in contrast to all the other figures in the book as her inner rage and insanity seem to show in her countenance and bearing. Her presence is alluded to throughout the story because there are many mysterious events like the fire that is laid in Mr Rochester's bedroom, the attack on Mr Mason, and the night when Bertha comes into Jane's bedroom and tears her veil. A culprit for these deeds is never found but the reader and Jane Eyre presume that Mr Rochester knows the truth and is hiding something from them. When Jane Eyre sees Bertha for the first time in the night when she breaks into her bedroom, she does not know who this person is and in a conversation with Mr Rochester she describes her as such:

'The shape standing before me had never crossed my eyes within the precincts of Thornfield Hall before; the height, the contoure were new to me.'

'Describe it, Jane.'

'It seemed, sir, a woman, tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging long down her back. [...]

'Did you see her face?'

'[...] At that moment I saw the reflection of the visage and features quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass.'

'And how were they?'

'Fearful and ghastly to me – oh, sir, I never saw a face like it! It was a discoloured face – it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!'

'Ghosts are usually pale, Jane.'

'This, sir, was purple: the lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed: the black eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes. (JE 281)

This encounter by night is important as Jane Eyre instantly notices Bertha's savagery and is therefore afraid of the creature. Although Mr Rochester tries to calm her down and convince her that her nerves played a trick on her, she is sure of Bertha's existence, and although the reader knows nothing about Mr Rochester hiding his wife in the attic at that point of the story a first impression of the character of Bertha Mason, the madwoman, is created.

Before Jane Eyre meets Bertha in the attic after the failed marriage, Mr Rochester introduces her as mad and gives a short account of her family history of madness: "Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, as both a



madwoman and a drunkard! – as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points” (JE 290). What has already been observed by Jane Eyre after their gloomy encounter by night is in that passage affirmed and explained by Mr Rochester. Although Berta’s appearance is described very shortly and the scene in which she is met by the main protagonists is confined to one and a half pages, it is of great importance with regards to physiognomic functions:

What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell: it grovelled seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. [...] the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind-feet. [...] The maniac bellowed: she parted her shaggy locks from her visage, and gazed wildly at her visitors. I recognized well that purple face – those bloated features. [...] the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. She was a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest [...] (JE 291).

The first thing that is extraordinary and unique within *Jane Eyre* is the repeated comparison with animals. Bertha is compared to a beast, a wild animal, and a hyena. She does not speak, but she bellows and finally tries to attack Mr Rochester with her teeth. Her gaze is wild and her features are bloated, so her face is rather deformed. These descriptions have a de-humanising effect, and it can be argued that she is not perceived as a human being with positive and negative character traits as are all the other characters in the book, but she is only bad, there seems to be no good feature in her character and in her face. She is ugly, uncontrolled, aggressive and dangerous and therefore has to be locked away in the attic. Although it seems as if Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre were rather contrastive, there are theories which interpret this strong opposition as a source of a close relationship which makes it likely that Bertha was constructed as “Jane’s dark double” (Gilbert and Gubar 360) who acts whenever Jane cannot. Jane is described as little and plain, while Bertha is described as tall and very peculiar in appearance, and acts like the tearing of the wedding veil or the attack on Mr Rochester are read as the acting out of Jane’s suppressed wishes. (see Gilbert and Gubar 360) As this assumption does not purely rely on physiognomic differences, but includes the close interpretation of psychological dynamics which would exceed the frame of this

paper, it will only remain a short remark which adds a shade of meaning to Bertha's character that might be connected to but not easily be detected in her countenance.

In this description the darkness of features including hair, brows and lips, is connected with savagery and aggression. According to Irwin, dark features often designate "oppressive masculinity" (25) , and in depicting Bertha Mason as having a tall figure and virile force, she can be seen as incorporating various typical male characteristics while no traces of femininity are discovered in her appearance. Instead of "noble features", or a "fine head of hair" she is marked by "bloated features" and "shaggy locks".

## 5 **Brontë's descriptions – *Villette***

Chapter 4 will be dedicated to the identification and close examination of physiognomic descriptions in *Villette*. The appearance of characters' "figures", as discussed in context with *Jane Eyre*, is not described in *Villette*, which is why I will apply a slightly different structure and naming of sub-chapters than in the previous chapter.

### 5.1 **Plot Summary**

The protagonist, Lucy Snowe, lives in a household with her godmother, Mrs. Bretton, Mrs Bretton's son, Graham Bretton, and a young girl, Paulina, also known as "Polly". After Polly leaves the house because her father takes her away Lucy leaves and finds employment as a carer for Mrs Marchmont who dies after some time. In the years after that incident Lucy experiences an unspecified family tragedy and has to find a new occupation. She leaves England by ship and finally arrives in Villette, the capital of Labassecour where she starts working as a teacher at Madame Beck's boarding school. A young Englishman, Dr John, starts visiting the boarding school frequently because he is in love with Ginevra Fanshawe, one of the pupils, who is soon revealed as unworthy of Dr John's feelings. The reader is told that Dr John is in fact Dr John Graham Bretton, whom Lucy knows from her youth and the two develop an intimate friendship. Also Paulina, who is now called Paulina de Bassompierre, because her father has been awarded a title, appears again when Dr Bretton

saves her from being trampled down in a mass panic at the theatre one night. The two notice that they also know each other from their childhood and soon renew their friendship which eventually turns into love. At this point in the story, Lucy encounters the mysterious nun for the first time who later turns out to be the disguise of Ginevra's lover, de Hamal. Slowly but surely, Lucy falls in love with Paul M. Emmanuel, a colleague at Madame Beck's school, but their happiness is hindered by a group of intriguers, including Mme Beck and the family of Paul M. Emmanuel's dead fiancé. Paul M. is forced to leave for the West Indies and it does not become clear whether he ever returns from his journey. The reader is not presented with a happy ending and is finally left with an open ending that can be interpreted in various ways.

## **5.2 Head**

The description of person's heads is of equal importance in *Villette* as it is in *Jane Eyre*. Again, the eyes are regarded as being windows to the soul, through which Lucy Snowe can, with great certainty, reveal what might be hidden and unseen to most other intra-diegetic spectators. The focus on facial descriptions can furthermore be seen as a logical consequence of the strong focus on pathognomy that has been mentioned above. Most emotions are read in the moveable parts of the face, and momentarily expressed emotions are very often the basis for character analysis in both novels discussed.

### **5.2.1 DrJohn Graham Bretton**

This young doctor (he was young) had no common aspect. His stature looked imposingly tall in that little chamber, and amidst that group of Dutch-made women; his profile was clear, fine, and expressive: perhaps his eye glanced from face to face rather too vividly, too quickly, and too often, but it had a most pleasant character, and so had his mouth; his chin was dull, cleft, Grecian, and perfect. As to his smile, one could not in a hurry make up one's mind as to the descriptive epithet it merited; there was something in it that pleased, but something too that brought surging up into the mind all one's foibles and weak point: all that could lay one open to a laugh [...] (V 96)

Dr John Graham Bretton immediately catches Lucy's attention because of his exceptional height, profile and smile. Everything about his appearance is described as amiable. Vivacity and quickness of his glances is described as positive, which corresponds to Lavater's and Buttkus' notions of beauty in connection to liveliness and a certain spirit that inhabits the features.

The quotation below is an incidence of simile of Dr Bretton's face with nature, in fact Lucy Snowe compares his lips (and seemingly his teeth) to roses and summer clouds dyed in silver, pearl and purple. These notions are rather positive and not only signal the reader that Ms Snowe's feelings towards Dr Bretton are warm but at the same time the reader is informed about certain inner qualities of Dr Bretton's character. The reader gets to know him as responding visibly and presumably also in terms of mood to "sweet influences", in this case it is Ms Fanshawes flattering to which he responds. In contrast to that, he does not like anything wild, untamed, intense or dangerous. The reader is even tempted to regard Dr Bretton as being very eager to avoid conflicts and adventures at all costs. These dangerous, intense, sudden influences are metaphorically referred to as "storm", and just as a storm might harm the dyes of a rose or blow away the summer clouds, harsh feelings would certainly harm him. This is all read by the heroine from the way his lips look (or change) in the situations described: [...] to bright, soft, sweet influences his eyes and lips gave bright, soft, sweet welcome, beautiful to see as dyes of rose and silver, pearl and purple, embuing summer clouds; for what belonged to storm, what was wild and intense, dangerous, sudden, and flaming, he held no sympathy [...] (V259).

The following observations serve Lucy more as a basis for revealing Dr Bretton's mood and feelings rather than traces of his character. Lucy Snowe is very worried about Dr Bretton and is glad to see that his bearing and countenance seem to signal happiness and ease: "If a laughing eye with a lively light, and a face bright with beaming and healthy energy, could attest that he was better, better he certainly was" (V250). The first quotation lets his features speak for him, and affirm his well-being. In the second quotation, his figure and bearing prove that he is finally released from his suffering: "He stood up: in the port of his head, the carriage of his figure, in his beaming eye and mien, there revealed itself a liberty which was more than ease – a mood which was disdain of his past bondage" (V251)

In the following description, Paulina (often referred to as Polly) believes to see parallels between Dr Bretton's seal, his hand, and his character. She thinks that the letter looks as if it had been written in a calm state of mind and the seal

reveals steadiness. Paulina draws parallels between Dr Bretton's face and his writing, which are similar in appearance, and can therefore only belong to one and the same person. This description is a great illustration of Lavater's principle of continuity with regards to the fact that every single feature permits to draw reliable conclusions about the whole, from which it stems

Graham's hand is like himself, Lucy, and so is his seal – all clear, firm, and rounded – no slovenly splash of way – a full, solid, steady drop – a distinct impress: no pointed turns harshly pricking the optic nerve, but a clean, mellow, pleasant manuscript, that soothes you as you read. It is like his face – just like the chiselling of his features: do you know his autograph? (V374)

It is, however, important to note that at that point, Paulina has met Dr Graham Bretton in person and had the chance to form an opinion on his character, so her theories on the connection of handwriting, hands, face, and character might as well rely heavily on her previous knowledge of Dr Bretton and her feelings towards him.

### 5.2.2 Paul M. Emmanuel

The little man looked well, very well; there was a clearness of amity in his blue eye, and a glow of good feeling on his dark complexion, which passed perfectly in the place of beauty: one really did not care to observe that his nose, though far from small, was of no particular shape, his cheek thin, his brow marked and square, his mouth no rosebud: one accepted him as he was, and felt his presence the reverse of damping of insignificant. (V338)

What is explicitly mentioned about Paul M. Emmanuel is that although he is not beautiful his impression on Miss Snowe is very favourable. She says that one would not care to observe his lack of beauty, although she then continues by observing it in great detail. Her conclusion is, however, in favour of Paul M. as the overall picture is agreeable to those who meet him.

Very soon after their first encounter, Miss Snowe reveals in Paul M.'s movements traces of choler, and as it is normally the case with Charlotte Brontë's heroines, her unerring physiognomic analysis proves true in later chapters where he is described as a character who gets angry very easily and is no longer the master of his feelings when confronted with an uneasy situation: "M. Emanuel entered with his vehement burst of latch and panel, and his deep, redundant bow, prophetic of choler" (V238).

The next quotation is uttered when M. Paul finds out that every member of the school apart from Miss Snowe has brought him a present to say farewell, and it is one of the instances where he has problems controlling his anger. The reading of his countenance in this situation conveys important information to the reader as his facial expression contradicts his verbal utterance in this case: “It is well!” dropped at length from the lips of M. Paul, and having uttered this phrase, he shadow of some great paroxysm – the swell of wrath, scorn, resolve – passed over his brow, rippled his lips and lined his cheeks” (V340). This sudden anger that M. Paul feels illustrates not only that he is disappointed by Miss Snowe’s ignorance of certain customs, but furthermore it can be read as a sign of personal disappointment and hurt feelings on his side when viewed in context.

M. Paul’s moods are described repeatedly by Miss Snowe when she recalls encounters with him. One of these moods is jealousy, which is signalled by the dark colour of his veins. He usually expresses his disapproval quite overtly, and Miss Snowe discovers a certain similarity between him and Napoleon Bonaparte:

[...] he was naturally a little man of unreasonable moods. When overwrought, which he often was, he became acutely irritable; and besides, his veins were dark with a livid bella-donna tincture, the essence of his jealousy. I do not mean merely the tender jealousy of the heart, but that sterner, narrower sentiment whose seat is in the head. [...] I used to think, as I sat looking at M. Paul, while he was knitting his brow or protruding his lip over some exercise of mine [...] that he had points of resemblance to Napoleon Bonaparte. [...] In a shameless disregard of magnanimity, he resembled the great Emperor. [...] To pursue a somewhat audacious parallel, in a love of power, in an eager grasp after supremacy, M. Emanuel was like Bonaparte. (V348-349)

In the paragraphs that follow the extract given above she identifies in M. Paul the qualities of a merciless emperor who would rather fight or ban people who are of a different opinion than show some generosity or “magnanimity”. Although Miss Snowe identifies in M. Paul these faults, she is herself not ready to tolerate them. Just as there were people who rebelled against Bonaparte’s regime, she is of the opinion that M. Paul “was a man not always to be submitted to. Sometimes it was needful to resist; it was right to stand still, to

look up into his eyes and tell him that his requirements went beyond reason – that his absolutism verged on tyranny” (V 350).

Miss Snowe sees herself in the role of the rebel and as she is no pupil to M. Paul she can give her opinion quite freely although she knows that his influence has already resulted in one teacher being fired because she was a thorn in his side. However, Miss Snowe finds out that his moods are out of his control and very often followed by regret, and therefore it is not her aim to become his fiend by constantly fuelling his wrath, but rather to become a close friend who knows how to handle him. Her physiognomic skill can be seen as assisting her in this task as she is the only one who knows his character before she has a chance to get to know him. The colour of his veins and his manner of bowing, reveal to her his true nature and this helps her to cope with his moods.

### 5.2.3 Pauline de Bassompierre (“Polly”)

Although occurring rather late in the book, the comparison of Pauline with the little spaniel, Sylvie that “invited affection by her beauty and her vivacious life” (V 416) gives a very clear impression of the girl: “She was very tiny, and had the prettiest little innocent face, the silkiest long ears, the finest dark eyes in the world. I never saw her, but I thought of Paulina de Bassompierre: forgive the association, reader, it *would* occur” (V415). The fact that she apologizes for the comparison makes clear that it is not a very favourable one for Pauline, yet, they really seem to be quite similar in appearance and behaviour. Both, the dog and the girl, are described to be rather naïve, simple-minded, and very eager to get other people’s attention. The expression of innocence is clearly detected on Pauline’s face more than once, but sometimes paired with other character traits, like petulance or perverseness: “Seeing, however, the utmost innocence in her countenance – combined with some transient perverseness and petulance [...]” (V304). Although certain faults are detected in Paulina’s appearance and character, Miss Snowe does reveal behind her naïve, lightheaded facade a certain strength that not every observer is likely to see:

In Paulina there was more force, both of feeling and character, than most people thought – than Graham himself imagined – than she would ever show to those who did not wish to see it. To speak truth, reader, there is no

excellent beauty, no accomplished grace, no reliable refinement, without strength as excellent, as complete, as trustworthy. (V314).

This description does not only make Pauline appear in a very positive light, but in addition to that it is a strong statement with regards to beauty as it promotes the idea that perfect beauty cannot be accomplished without complete, trustworthy strength. This plea is directly addressed to the reader, and adds another perspective to outward beauty, namely that it has to be supported by inner qualities, and is otherwise deemed to stay imperfect or unreliable. By addressing the reader with this assertion, Brontë might attempt to raise the reader's awareness of certain limitations to outward perfection and beauty, because she establishes inner perfection as a necessary precondition of outward perfection. However, this causal relationship cannot be observed to be valid in both directions, because although inner strength might be viewed as a necessary precondition of outward perfection, it does not necessarily entail outward perfection. The two female protagonists themselves are probably the best example of this, because Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe are both described as being virtuous and nearly flawless while their outward appearance is rather plain and unremarkable.

The passage quoted above is continued with another vow of Lavater's principles of continuity and homogeneity as Lucy Snowe compares people to trees, both having been created by nature, which does not create any inconsistent objects, and only brings forth homogenous creations: "As well might you look for good fruit and blossom on a rootless and sapless tree, as for charms that will endure in a feeble and relaxed nature. For a little while, the blooming semblance of beauty may flourish round weakness; but it cannot bear a blast: it soon fades, even in serenest sunshine" (V 314).

This illustrates quite well that Brontë as well as Lavater assume a certain consistency within humans, which makes it very unlikely that a person with a feeble nature possesses any charms that are consistent. The direct connection of Paulina's mind and body is emphasised in the next quotation, in which the Frenchmen at the party admire her for the combination of both. They are charmed by her looks as well as her manners, and her knowledge of certain



subjects, which they choose consciously, because they expect her to know something about them.

The grace and mind of Paulina charmed these thoughtful Frenchmen: the fineness of her beauty, the soft courtesy of her manner, her immature, but real inbred tact, pleased their national taste; they clustered about her, not indeed to talk science, which would have rendered her dumb, but to touch on many subjects in letters, in arts, in actual life, on which it soon appeared that she had both read and reflected (V 313).

In describing Paulina, Brontë creates the portrait of a young woman, who, despite her obvious and widely acknowledged beauty, does not solely rely on it, but additionally demonstrates inner qualities and education in front of her many admirers. The combination of moral goodness, intelligence, and flawless beauty is indeed a very rare one in Charlotte Brontë's novels. A reason for this might be sought in her effort to promote a concept of beauty, which can be regarded as highly revolutionary for the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By making the combination of bodily and moral perfection the exception rather than the rule, she definitely opens up new perspectives in a time, which was widely ruled by the belief in a logical, readable world.

#### 5.2.4 Ginevra Fanshawe

Miss Ginevra Fanshawe is introduced to the reader on the ship that carries Miss Snowe to Villetle. She is described as pretty and light-haired. There are not any explicit references to Miss Fanshawe's character, but the fact that she is light-haired rather qualifies her as feminine and Irwin observed this phenomenon by asserting that "[b]londe women tend to be excessively feminine – frail or flirtatious or both" (25). He names Ginevra Fanshawe as one of the examples of these women in the course of his analysis. The quotation from *Villetle* reads as follows: "The other lady-passenger, with the gentleman-companion, was quite a girl, pretty and fair; her simple print dress, untrimmed straw-bonnet, and large shawl, gracefully worn, formed a costume plain to Quakerism. Yet, for her, becoming enough" (V 53).

Lucy Snowe gets to know Ginevra Fanshawe a little better during their sea voyage, and it does not take long before she connects the girl's character to her appearance. Fair, fragile beauty is very likely to designate incapacity to endure. Lucy Snowe seems to feel superior to Ginevra and tells her how to behave best.

This relationship between the two women does not change very drastically as Lucy always looks down on her, and criticises her for her selfish unreasonable behaviour.

I am sorry to say, she tormented me with an unsparing selfishness during the whole time of our mutual distress. Nothing could exceed her impatience and fretfulness. [...] Many a time since have I noticed, in persons of Ginevra Fanshawe's light, careless temperament, and fair, fragile style of beauty, an entire incapacity to endure [...] the man who takes such a woman for his wife, ought to be prepared to guarantee her an existence all sunshine. Indignant at last with her teasing peevishness, I curtly requested her "to hold her tongue." The rebuff did her good, and it was observable that she liked me no worse for it. (V 57)

#### 5.2.5 Lucy Snowe

In the night when Lucy arrives at Miss Beck's boarding school, she is obviously observed closely by two persons, the first being M. Paul Emmanuel, who is Miss Beck's cousin:

'Mon cousin,' began madame, 'I want your opinion. We know your skill in physiognomy; use it now. Read that countenance.' The little man fixed on me his spectacles. A resolute compression of the lips, and gathering of the brow, seemed to say that he meant to see through me, and that a veil would be no veil for him "(V 66).

The man's result is he can see many things in her face, good as well as bad, and that he would advise Madame Beck to employ her if she needed her service. As has been described in chapter 2, scenes in which physiognomic advice decided about whether somebody was hired or not, were rather normal in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The second person, who tries to find out something about Miss Snowe by watching her countenance, is Madame Beck herself:

I dare say she sat a quarter of an hour on the edge of my bed, gazing at my face. She then drew nearer, bent close over me; slightly raised my cap, and turned back the border so as to expose my hair; she looked at my hand lying on the bed-clothes [...] Of what nature were the conclusions deduced of this scrutiny? Were they favourable or otherwise? Vain question. Madame's face of stone (for of stone in its present night-aspect it looked: it had been human and, as I said before, motherly, in the salon) betrayed no response. (V69-70)

This scene also describes Miss Beck searching Lucy's belongings to make sure that she is not employing a criminal or otherwise disagreeable woman. Here, the result of Miss Beck's investigations is not instantly revealed to the reader, because Madame Beck's face is described as being similar to stone. Her opinion gradually becomes known within the next few weeks Lucy spends at the school during which Madame Beck shows more and more that she deems Lucy Snowe trustworthy. Therefore the reader can assume that Madame Beck did not discover anything worrisome in Lucy's countenance or belongings, otherwise she would probably show greater scepticism and reproach.

The quotation below is one of the few instances in which Lucy Snowe's expression is read by M. Paul. His reaction is highly emotional, and it is rather unlikely that his anger is solely triggered by a momentary movement in Miss Snowe's mimic. It is rather probable that his opinion of her has formed in the weeks that passed previously to that scene, in which he says he closely watched her behaviour. Her facial expression should rather be seen as finally triggering the emotional outbreak:

I am no judge of what expression crossed my face when he thus spoke, but it was one which provoked him: he accused me of being reckless, worldly, and epicurean; ambitious of greatness and feverishly athirst for the pomps and vanities of life. It seems I had no "devouement", no "recueillement" in my character; no spirit of grace, faith, sacrifice, or self-abasement. (V302)

As Lucy does not react to M. Paul's accusations he finishes his argument by saying that "[he can] see in [her] nothing Christian: like many other Protestants, she revelled in the pride and self-will of paganism" (V 302). So, he accuses her of behaving unchristian, which seems to displease him enormously, and it seems to be his intention to degrade her and make her feel her wrongs. However, Lucy Snowe is used to his moods and does not take him too seriously. She does not believe that he actually read all this in her face, but rather thinks that he is again victim to his own uncontrollable temper.

#### 5.2.6 Madame Beck

Madame Beck, the headmistress at the boarding school where Lucy works, is described and analysed in great detail and in fact a whole chapter is named

after the lady. In the following quotation physiognomy and phrenology are both used and in Madame Beck's case, the truth seems to be obvious, as all the characteristics that Miss Snowe detects in her appearance, are later on affirmed by Miss Beck's deeds.

When attired, Madame Beck appeared a personage of a figure rather short and stout, yet still graceful in its own peculiar way: that is, with the grace resulting from proportion of parts. Her complexion was fresh and sanguine, not too rubicund; her eye, blue and serene; her dark silk dress fitted her as a French sempstress alone can make a dress fit; she looked well, though a little bourgeoisie: as bourgeoisie, indeed, she was. I know not what of harmony prevailed her whole person; and yet her face offered contrast, too; its features were by no means such as are usually seen in conjunction with a complexion of such blended freshness and repose: their outline was stern; her forehead was high but narrow; it expressed capacity and some benevolence, but no expanse; nor did her peaceful yet watchful eye ever know the fire which is kindled in the heart or the softness which flows thence. Her mouth as hard: it could be a little grim; her lips were thin. For sensibility and genius, with all their tenderness and temerity, I felt somehow that madame would be the right sort of Minos in petticoats. (V72)

In this quotation, there are numerous references to historical figures that do tell a lot about the lady's character, if read attentively. She is compared to Minos, who was a "powerful and just ruler, but also a tyrannical exactor of justice", which can be read up in the Explanatory Notes. The petticoats are used as a symbol of the Jesuits, and Madame Beck is Jesuitical "in that she acts ruthlessly under cover of her mild beneficence" (V524). By uniting Minos and Jesuitical behaviour in Madame Beck's character, she is identified as being strict, ruthless, merciless, but trying to act rather mildly and understanding. Miss Snowe therefore knows that she cannot rely on the woman's friendliness as it might as well be followed by a ruthless deed.

## **6 Methods - How are faces and bodies described?**

This chapter is dedicated to the methods that Brontë applies in designing her characters and constructing physiognomic links. At first, the modes of writing in the relevant passages will be described analysing the trustworthiness of the self-appointed physiognomists and their motives for reading faces. Although each method will be observed individually it has to be kept in mind that, although Brontë might have deviated from some of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

conventions, it will be helpful to view the analysed text passages in the light of Matt's general description of the literary portrait at that time as a

Reihe von Normenspezifizierungen [...], wobei das Körperelement nur die Funktion hat, auf einen allgemeineren Wert zu verweisen und dessen Vorhandensein zu bezeugen. Das Gesicht wird zu einem erstarrten Wertsystem. Das ist nur möglich aufgrund einer unüberlegten und doch restlos akzeptierten Physiognomik. Die erscheinende Individualität wird sogleich zum sittlichen Profil. Das sittliche Profil eines Menschen ist aber in Wahrheit kein Phänomen, sondern ein von der Umwelt angefertigtes theoretisches Konstrukt (Matt 110)

This basic assumption will be applicable to all the methods described. It is essential to pay particular attention to the fact that what is assumed as natural or universally valid can in fact be broken down to a theoretical construct and that seeming individuality is instantly transformed into a moral profile of some kind. Furthermore, the quotation applies to Brontë's writing as the heroine's physiognomic assumptions are mostly accepted by the reader although they are uttered spontaneously and not considered very carefully.

### **6.1 Modes of writing**

It is easy to find out for the attentive reader that all of Brontë's descriptions are made, not by an omniscient 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator, but by the heroine who naturally has a limited frame of knowledge and is pre-conditioned by her personal life story and experience. The reader only gets her point of view and sees the others through her eyes, with only a few exceptions, one occurring in *Villette*, where the heroine's face is read by Madame Beck's cousin as described in the previous chapter.

Although it is not always the heroine who reads the face, the mode of description is always subjective. In fact, just as in real life, observations of faces have to be made by a person from a certain perspective and what is interesting in the two Brontë novels is that the describing persons are intra-diegetic and therefore obviously prejudiced and subjective in their descriptions and physiognomic evaluations. It is certainly an effect of this writing mode that, although physiognomy is applied numerous times, it is never presented as a complete, rational, logical science. It can be argued that Brontë implicitly reveals the inadequacies of Lavater's doctrine as a science that Matt explicitly describes in the following quotation:

Offenbar ist es unmöglich, einem Gesicht gegenüber, zu dem man in ein Kommunikationsverhältnis irgendwelcher Art tritt, anders als spontan wertend zu reagieren. Gleichzeitig aber wissen wir nicht, wie zu unseren physiognomischen Überzeugungen kommen. Wir gewinnen Resultate, oft im Bruchteil einer Sekunde, ohne in den Ablauf dieses fundamentalen von uns vollzogenen Urteilsaktes auch nur annähernd verlässliche [sic] Einsicht zu haben. Die theoretische Physiognomik Lavaters ist nichts als eine Rationalisierung dieser Gegebenheit, beruhend auf der Meinung: erstens, daß [sic] das Urteil, weil es als spontane Überzeugung erscheint, auch schon wahr sei; zweitens, daß [sic] die übersichtliche Sammlung solcher Urteile, weil sie eben wahr seien, zu einer dozierbaren und praktizierbaren Wissenschaft führen müsse.

Brontë does by no means assert that her heroines argue scientifically or rationally. She rather makes them apply physiognomy as a practice that is used and interpreted according to their personal opinion. The physiognomists in our two stories do not seem to pay particular attention to the question how and why they develop their opinions and interpretations. The link between body features and character traits is treated as direct and self-evident, and the process of evaluation is not paid particular attention.

Although the heroines are mainly describing their personal impression of the other characters' appearance, their portrayals are very likely to present a realistic depiction in most cases. This is due to the fact that Charlotte Brontë's heroines can be said to develop a special relationship with the reader by directly addressing him/her several times in the novel, as for instance in: "**To speak truth, reader**, there is no excellent beauty, no accomplished grace, no reliable refinement, without strength as excellent, as complete, as trustworthy" (V314). The heroine's opinion and interpretation, although as personal as those of other characters, is valued higher because it is addressed to the reader directly, and while other characters are merely actors on a stage, the heroines can step down into the audience, and convince them of their opinion.

We can assume that Lavater was of the opinion that physiognomy has to be learned and trained as he includes in his "Fragmente" practical instructions for people who want to understand and learn the art of physiognomy, and furthermore presents very detailed regulations determining who is able to be a proper physiognomist and who is not (see Lavater, *Phys. Fragm.* 107-117).

Although we do not assume that either Jane Eyre or Lucy Snowe are learned physiognomists, the reader is tempted to believe them from the beginning, and in fact, what they predict in their physiognomic readings turns out to be true in the course of the story. Their ability to read faces properly can also be viewed as a sign of wisdom and insight.

## **6.2 Faces personified**

In the course of her novel *Jane Eyre*, Brontë repeatedly personifies bodily features and goes so far as giving them a voice of their own. Mr Rochester asserts that Jane's eye smiles at his speech, that it is susceptible. It is the eye that is proud and at the same time favourable. This technique of personification emphasises the importance and force of expression of bodily features even more. In the following scene Mr Rochester is dressed up as a gypsy woman who reads Jane's future. Throughout the passage Jane believes that she is talking to a gypsy.

The flame flickers in the eye; the eye shines like dew; it looks soft and full of feeling; it smiles at my jargon: it is susceptible; impression follows impression through its clear sphere; where it ceases to smile it is sad; an unconscious lassitude weights on the lid: that signifies melancholy resulting from loneliness. It turns from me; it will not suffer further scrutiny: it seems to deny, by a mocking glance, the truth of the discoveries I have already made – to disown the charge both of sensibility and chagrin: its pride and reserve only confirm me in my opinion. The eye is favourable. (JE 200)

The next feature that Mr Rochester reads is Jane's mouth. From this mouth Mr Rochester deduces that she should not be lonely. What is more, he believes to know that she does not talk about her feelings. He tells her that her mouth shows that she should feel affection for her interlocutor, which in fact might also be part of his tactics to win Jane's heart.

As to the mouth, it delights at times in laughter; it is disposed to impart all that the brain conceives; though I dare say it would be silent on much the heart experiences. Mobile and flexible, it was never intended to be compressed in the eternal silence of solitude: It is a mouth which should speak much and smile often; and have human affection for its interlocutor. That feature too is propitious. (JE 200)

In her brow he reads something unfortunate, hindering her fortune. While all the other parts of her face seem to be an expression of a happy life the brow is the one that expresses the possibility of failure and unhappiness. Seemingly, the

different parts of her face contradict each other and are manifestations of various character traits.

I see no enemy to a fortunate issue but in the brow; and that brow professes to say- "I can live alone, if self-respect and circumstances require me so to do. I need not sell my soul to buy bliss. I have an inward treasure born with me, which can keep me alive if all extraneous delights should be withheld, or offered only at a price I cannot afford to give." (JE 200)

Finally, the forehead enters the dialogue, declaring Jane's reason and analytic ability. I would argue that these features are not only given a voice but that they are even involved in an actual discussion that might be a symbol of Jane's inner struggle. The reader often has the impression that the heroine is not sure which way to go or how she feels. In this respect her body – in this scene her face – exactly mirrors her feelings, and by the method of personification, Brontë draws the reader's attention to certain character traits that the reader might partly know already but that have not yet been stated explicitly.

The forehead declares, "Reason sits firm and holds the reins, and she will not let the feelings burst away and hurry her to wild chasms. The passions may rage furiously, like true heathens, as they are; and the desires may imagine all sorts of vain things: but judgement shall still have the last word in every argument, and the casting vote in every decision. Strong wind, earthquake-shock, and fire may pass by: but I shall follow the guiding of that still small voice which interprets the dictates of conscience." (JE 200)

The last turn in the discussion is not taken by a facial feature, but by Mr Rochester himself, who agrees with the forehead. This might be confusing, as it was Mr Rochester who made the body parts speak at first. He played the part of the eyes, the brow and the forehead and answers as if he were a different person. I would read this as evidence for the autonomy and ultimate validity of physiognomic descriptions. Although, the analysis is made by a character, it is treated as an ultimate truth, independent from the character who utters it.

'Well said, forehead; your declaration shall be respected. I have formed my plans – right plans I deem them – and in them I have attended to the claims of conscience, the counsels of reason. I know how soon youth would fade and bloom perish, if, in the cup of bliss offered but one dreg of shame, or one flavour of remorse were detected; and I do not want sacrifice, sorrow, dissolution – such is not my taste [...] (JE 200)

In conclusion of this scene, it can be stated that this physiognomic description and analysis differs from most of the others as it does not in fact illustrate the



detection of character traits from bodily features. Mr Rochester has known Jane for a long time and is likely to use his knowledge of her in this little masquerade. Therefore, it has to be kept in mind that here the character might not really read all this from her face, but that he only ascribes character traits, that he believes to know already, to her features.

There are two examples of that method to be found in *Villette*. The first one is a complaint of Lucy Snowe, who says that Dr Bretton does not read her features, although they do all speak. Therefore he does not know her real inner self: "With a now welcome force, I realized his entire misapprehension of my character and nature. He wanted always to give me a rôle not mine. Nature and I opposed him. He did not at all guess what I felt: he did not read my eyes, or face, or gestures; though, I doubt not, all spoke" (V318).

Lucy, in comparison to the ignorant Dr Bretton, is very talented in reading faces and very attentive to what certain face features speak, as in this instance where she senses M. Pauls feelings by reading his gaze: "I saw the damples gather on M. Paul's brow, and his eye spoke a passionate yet sad reproach" (V400).

Another instance of a personified face can be observed when Jane Eyre finally reveals her special relationship to Mr Rochester: "I understand the language of his countenance and movements" (JE 174). In this passage, Mr Rochester's countenance and movements are said to speak a language, and just as any other language, it is not intelligible to everybody alike, but Jane Eyre takes on a privileged position. This method certainly supports the development of their relationship, as it presents the two characters as being set apart from the others by the fact that only Jane Eyre can understand the language that Mr Rochester's features speak.

### **6.3 Construction of stereotypes**

The strategy of characterising certain people by grouping them stereotypically is touched upon in *Villette* as well as in *Jane Eyre*, and is described by Wolf as following a long tradition of grouping individuals into certain categories to enable an objective readability of the world, as e.g. was tried to be achieved within the

“Charakterkunde” and “Temperamentenlehre”, and later on also based on sociological and biological theories. In 19<sup>th</sup> century realistic literature this categorisation shows up and develops in two ways: Firstly, physiognomic descriptions become more and more eclectic as there are already a considerable number of sources available. Secondly, the number of categories into which characters can be grouped is increased enormously, which lessens the heuristic importance of this method of categorisation (Wolf, “Speaking Faces” 400-401). Irwin reveals a certain stereotypical treatment of the characters’ colouring in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature, which has “more to do with temperament than with mere physical appearance” (25). While darkness is most often a sign of masculinity in men, it is a sign of passion in ladies. Blonde women, on the contrary are often described as being “excessively feminine – frail or flirtatious or both” (25), as is the case with Ginevra Fanshawe in *Vilette*. (see *ibid* 25). The following sections are entitled according to the stereotype described and each contains relevant quotations from the primary sources.

### 6.3.1 Père noble de theatre

“Mr Eshton, the magistrate of the district, is gentleman-like: his hair is quite white, his eyebrows and whiskers still dark, which gives him something of the appearance of a ‘père noble de théâtre’” (JE 173). By categorising Mr Eshton as such, she gives him away as a member of the following group: “Personnage d'un certain âge et de belle prestance, à l'air grave et imposant.” (a person of a certain age and stateliness with a serious and imposing appearance”). To illustrate this figure of the père noble the dictionary offers various examples of its occurrence in literature: “*Puis, se calmant, tâchant d'attraper une dignité de père noble [...]*” (Zola 1203) [...] (“*Then, calming himself, he tried to assume the dignity of a père noble*”). This quotation adds to the characteristics that were mentioned in the dictionary definition. The reader may picture an elderly man who appears to be stately, serious, imposing and dignified. The next example can be regarded as adding a new shade of meaning: “Il jouait les pères nobles, les ventrus, les rondeurs; mais il aurait voulu jouer les philosophes, les sentencieux, les saints, les sages et même les rois tragiques, les princes dépossédés. Par malheur, à peine entré en scène, il produisait de merveilleux effets comiques (Duhamel 14). (“He played the pères nobles, the bellied, the roundish characters; but he wanted to play the philosophers, the

sententious, the saints, the wise and the tragic kings, the dispossessed princes. Unfortunately, when he entered the stage in pain, he produced wonderful comic effects.”)<sup>2</sup>.

This quotation describes the père noble as a character, who tries to be serious, but by that produces a comic effect. Additionally, the père noble is enumerated in a row with the bellied and the rounded characters, which might contribute to the perception of the character as rather corpulent. This close investigation of the term père noble de theatre was not merely presented to refine the reader’s picture of Mr Eshton, but to illustrate a major point regarding reader perception and literary portrait: To a reader who is totally unaware of the figure of the père noble Mr Eshton’s visualisation will be achieved by the more commonly used descriptions characterising him as gentleman-like and white-haired, and - as the name suggests – noble. A reader to whom the stereotype is familiar, however, might have a particular idea of Mr Eshton that depends on his personal perception of a père noble. Although stereotypical descriptions might simplify the processes of perception and visualisation they do not limit the reader’s freedom of imagination as they only provide a certain frame that might be filled differently depending on the previous knowledge and attitude of the reader.

### 6.3.2 Class of governances

The other exception to the rule of the face-reading heroine is given in form of a short reference in *Jane Eyre* where one of the ladies at Mr Rochester’s says the following: “‘I noticed her; I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her [Jane Eyre’s] class.’ ‘[...] I have just one word to say of the whole tribe; they are a nuisance” (JE 176). She then tells about some of the governesses she had as a child, and they are described as “lachrymose and low-spirited”, “coarse and insensible” (176). These character traits are not, however, ascribed to certain individuals although these women are referred to by their names but rather assumed to be typical of a whole group. This simple statement about faults of a certain class is sufficient to create an imaginary

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<sup>2</sup> All definitions in French taken from <http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/noble>

group of people, who might in fact not have anything in common apart from their profession and their financial situation.

Although Miss Ingram's dislike of the whole class has been described in detail, she still feels the need to refer to Jane Eyre in particular when the ladies think about asking her to join in their charade game. Miss Ingram thinks it better to exclude her from the charade game because "she looks too stupid for any game of the sort" (JE 182). In a first step, Jane Eyre is identified as one of them, and in a second step she is referred to individually which supports the prejudices presented before. As reader sympathy is very likely to be on the side of Jane Eyre the prejudiced face reading is probably dismissed as being unreliable and the lady probably as being unable to read faces properly.

### 6.3.3 English and French faces

Never have I heard English women handled as M. Paul that morning handled them: he spared nothing – neither their minds, morals, manners, nor personal appearance. I specially remember his abuse of their tall stature, their long necks, their thin arms, their slovenly dress, their pedantic education, their impious scepticism (!), their insufferable pride, their pretentious virtue: over which he ground his singular things. Oh! He was spiteful, acrid, savage; and, as a natural consequence, detestably ugly. (V340-341)

This quotation is of importance in two respects: Firstly, it is an instance of constructing a stereotype. In this case, the category of English Women is introduced, which is marked by certain external features, such as long arms, and necks, and a tall stature. Here the description of the bodily features and their physiognomic interpretation are not linked directly, but just enumerated one after the other. Their long necks and thin arms are not ascribed any negative character traits but in the quotation above they are obviously not regarded as favourable. Minds, morals, manners and personal appearance are treated as being equally important, and this evokes the sense of a certain relation between them. What is unique about this quotation is the mentioning of education which is obviously regarded as a decisive factor in connection with the described characters' manners and morals. All the other quotations presented would certainly support the notion of Determinism, as they totally ignore the dimension of character development, and emphasise the importance of static facial features. Although education remains only a short remark here,

and is not discussed in any detail it adds a dimension to Brontë's method of portrayal that might designate a certain awareness of the weaknesses of Lavater's original assumption, namely that a person's features clearly determine his/her character and moods. Additionally, Lucy determines a logical connection between Paul M. Emmanuel's behaviour and his appearance when she says that he looked detestably ugly as a consequence of his rude accusations.

When Lucy Snowe is asked to teach some girls her thoughts seem to be guided by similar stereotypical imaginations as M. Paul's. She traces something in their appearance that makes them look particularly French, or at least gives away that they are not English. Eyes and brows are the most important features, and they reveal the girls' insolence, and threaten stormy weather which probably is a metaphorical reference to their behaviour in class. In this situation it is difficult to say whether her physiognomic distinction between French and English girls is not influenced by her knowledge that the girls are all French. The fact that she feels threatened by the stormy weather that their eyes and brows promised might be due to the uncomfortable situation of being asked to spontaneously teach a group of lively, disobedient girls.

As I mounted the estrade [...] I beheld opposite to me a row of eyes and brows that threatened stormy weather – eyes full of an insolent light, and brows hard and unblushing as marble. The continental “female” is quite a different being to the insular “female” of the same age and class: I never saw such eyes and brows in England. (V 79)

The distinction between English and non-English faces seems to be of great importance, and suggests that English faces have particular features revealing them as such. Dr Graham Bretton is identified as looking English by Lucy Snowe: “he had, too, an English complexion, eyes, and form (V 96)”. In comparison to the other examples, she does not give any detailed information about certain features that strike her as looking English. What is remarkable nevertheless is that the remark about the Englishness of his features follows a long paragraph, in which she praises his appealing appearance and extraordinary beauty. In fact, all the descriptions of these seemingly nationally marked physiognomies are stereotypical, and signal the opinion of the observer about a certain nationality. While Lucy seems to have a negative attitude towards the French M. Paul is sceptical about English women. It is possible that

“French eyes and brows” were associated with certain schemata of colour and shape by a reader in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and therefore also carried a function in processes of reader perception and visualization (see chapter 7).

The quotations above suggest that physiognomy was not only applied as the author had intended, but there was a dark side to it as well. The original title of the English Translation suggests that Lavater's *Fragmente* were written “for the promotion of the knowledge and the love of mankind”. Unfortunately the thesis was misused for different purposes, like the support of racist arguments. Physiognomy was very often used to make nationalistic and racist distinctions, as it could be appropriated to these purposes easily. It is therefore not surprising that physiognomy had a tragic revival at the time of the Holocaust, as discussed in detail in Fritz' book *Adolf Hitler und die Physiognomik*. If regarded retrospectively this is easy to understand because the process of establishing certain categories is a short and simple one, as was illustrated above. If the political climate of the Second World War racial stereotypes that supported the political interests of those in power were likely to spread and enforce the racial prejudices emerging at the time.

#### **6.4 Contrastive and similar pairs of characters**

This method, which implies the explicit opposition and comparison of two characters, can be found in both novels under discussion. What is important here is that in *Jane Eyre* the emphasis is on the differences between the characters and it mostly serves to elevate one over the other in terms of appearance or (as typical of physiognomic analysis) character. The first quotation presented is taken from *Jane Eyre*, and describes the scene in which Jane compares herself to Blanche Ingram to abase herself, and to make herself aware of what she thinks is the truth, namely that someone like Mr Rochester could never be interested in her but is more likely to fall in love with Miss Ingram.

“...place the glass before you, and draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully, without softening one defect; omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity, write under it, ‘Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain’ Afterwards take a piece of smooth ivory- you have one prepared in your drawing box: take your palette; mix your

freshest, finest, clearest tints; choose your most delicate camel-hair pencils; delineate carefully the loveliest face you can imagine; paint it in your softest shades and sweetest hues, according to the description given by Mrs. Fairfax of Blanche Ingram: remember the raven ringlets, the oriental eye [...] Recall the august yet harmonious lineaments, the Grecian neck and bust; let the round and dazzling arm be visible, and the delicate hand [...] call it, 'Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank' Whenever in future you hold chance to fancy Mr Rochester thinks well of you, take out these two pictures and compare them: say; "Mr Rochester might probably win that noble lady's love, if he chose to strive for it; is it likely he would waste a serious thought on this indigent and insignificant plebeian?" (JE 160-161)

In the very beginning she shows that she is fully aware of her plainness and lack of beauty. This is described within the first 3 lines. Then she goes on by praising Miss Ingram's beauty, and she talks about her in superlatives to strengthen the contrast between this wonderful lady of rank and herself, a plain governess. With the help of these two pictures she hopes to be able to forget about her feelings for Mr Rochester and to accept the position that is determined by her poverty and her lack of beauty. The decisive force in this process is her power of will and her subjective perception of herself as it is her who makes the pictures express what she so desperately needs them to express: her total inferiority to Blanche Ingram. What is interesting about that portrait is that she paints it before she has ever seen Blanche Ingram with her own eyes. She relies on Mrs Fairfax's description and on her own imagination. So, in this case, physiognomy and the imagination and belief of the painter and the spectator are combined to achieve this psychological effect.

In the scene when Mr Rochester leads Jane Eyre into Bertha's prison for the first time, Jane and Bertha are contrasted:

'That is *my wife*,' said he. 'Such is the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know – such are the endearments which are to solace my leisure hours! And *this* is what I wished to have' (laying his hand on my shoulder) 'this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon. I wanted her just as a change after that fierce ragout. Wood and Briggs, look at the difference! Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder – this face with that mask – this form with that bulk; [...]' (JE 292)

In this comparison it becomes clear that Bertha represents everything that Jane does not. They are not only contrasted in looks, but also in character. Mr Rochester makes clear that he needed Jane so much because she was the

exact opposite of Bertha, because he needed a change. She is grave and quiet, while Bertha is wild and furious. Jane's eyes are clear, Bertha's eyes are red. While Jane has a face and a figure, Bertha has a mask and a bulk. Although every characteristic found in Bertha is on the first glance the opposite of Jane's characteristics, a closer observation reveals that Jane does carry traces from Bertha, and vice versa. As has been foreshadowed in 4.3.8, this creates an effect of Bertha being the dark psychological Double of Jane.

Claire Rosenfeld argues that authors consciously or unconsciously juxtapose "two characters, the one representing the socially acceptable or conventional personality, the other externalizing the free, uninhibited, often criminal self." (qut. in Gilbert and Gubar 361). Bertha can be viewed as being "the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress since her days at Gateshead." (Gilbert and Gubar 361). Only the final death of Bertha can break the spell of the past, and free Jane from her evil half, from her rage, and make a marriage with Mr Rochester possible (see Gilbert and Gubar 362).

A similar phenomenon can be detected in *Villette* where the heroine can be interpreted as relying on Polly (Pauline de Bassompierre) as her second half:

Lucy's passive calm contrasts with Polly's passionate intensity; her withdrawal with Polly's playfulness. But, as is so often the case in Brontë's fiction, these two antithetical figures have much in common. [...] That they are intimately connected becomes obvious when Lucy wants Polly to cry out at a moment of great joy so that she, Lucy, can get some relief. [...] As Q.D. Leavis suggests, Polly acts out all those impulses already repressed by Lucy so that the two girls represent the two sides of Lucy's divided self, and they are the first of a series of such representative antagonists. (Gilbert and Gubar 404)

Lucy looks down on Polly, because she describes her as a little "busy-body" in a scene where she insists on assisting her father at the tea table. Lucy sees herself as more mature and independent.

Another scene in which two contrasted characters are described is that of Mr Mason's arrival at Thornfield Hall. What is so surprising to Jane Eyre is that although the man is handsome she finds him dreadful. Although all of his



features might be beautiful at first sight she detects something unpleasant in each of them. The major point of criticism is that of lacking power and firmness, and this fact is emphasised by comparing him to Mr Rochester, who can be regarded as a prototype of firmness, grimness, determination, and power. While Mr Rochester is compared to a fierce falcon and a rough-coated, keen-eyed dog, Mr Mason is equalled with a sleek gander and a meek sheep. The animal comparisons can surely be interpreted metaphorically, and they strengthen the reader's perception of Mr Mason as being powerless, harmless, and unimpressive. Likewise Mr Rochester is again stylised as the dark, fierce, powerful, wild, but keen-eyed (!) person, and is therefore more likely to win the reader's sympathy. Colours are again designating certain qualities, as Mr Mason's animal metaphors are white, and Mr Rochester's are dark, and their character qualities are described as being just as oppositional as the two colours.

'[...] his complexion was singularly sallow: otherwise he was a fine-looking man, at first sight especially. On closer examination, you detected something in his face that displeased; or rather, that failed to please. His features were regular, but too relaxed: his eye was large and well cut, but the life looking out of it was a tame, vacant life – at least so I thought. [...] But I liked his physiognomy even less than before: it struck me as being at the same time unsettled and inanimate.[...] For a handsome and not an unamiable-looking man, he repelled me exceedingly: there was no power in that smooth-skinned face of a full oval shape; no firmness in that aquiline forehead; no command in that blank, brown eye. [...] I compared him with Mr Rochester. I think (with deference be it spoken) the contrast could not be much greater between a sleek gander and a fierce falcon: between a meek sheep and the rough-coated, keen-eyed dog, its guardian. [...] A curious friendship theirs must have been: a pointed illustration, indeed, of the old adage that 'extremes meet' (JE 189)

Mr Mason is described as smooth-skinned, while Mr Rochester is described as rough-coated. Although it is definitely Jane Eyre who decides here which of these features is more agreeable in a man, the reader is likely to see in Mr Rochester an agreeable character as he is one of the few who is described in detail and with reference to many of his virtues and faults. Mr Mason is in fact only described in comparison and contrast to Mr Rochester and does otherwise not receive any attention. As Jane suggests that their friendship is an example of the proverb "extremes meet", she reveals that their friendship must be curious in some way. She is sure that the two characters are contrastive, each in appearance and character, but still she accepts the possibility that they might

have a deep personal connection, a friendship. A similar incidence can be found in *Villette* where the differences between two persons are emphasised, but the conclusion of the whole description is still a special mental or spiritual affinity the two characters obviously share:

“You are patient and I am choleric; you are quiet and pale, and I am tanned and fiery; you are a strict Protestant, and I am a sort of lay Jesuit: but we are alike – there is affinity. Do you see it, mademoiselle, when you look in the glass? Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine – that your eyes are cut like mine? Do you hear that you have some of my tones of voice? Do you know that you have many of my looks? I perceive all this, and believe that you were born under my star.” (V367)

The method is not only used to elevate one person over the other, but also to show a certain kinship that is grounded on similarities in facial features, as illustrated in the first example where M. Paul compares himself to Lucy Snowe. The differences in appearance are somehow done away with by internal similarities. At the beginning of this paragraph M. Paul illustrates the obvious differences between the two, which are to be seen in their appearances as well as in their moods and behaviour. Although he presents a highly oppositional description his final aim is to reveal sameness. Similarities are detected in the shape of the forehead and the eyes, as well as in the voice quality. M. Paul is aware of the fact that he and Lucy are oppositional in many ways, but he attempts to convince her of the existence of a close relationship that only is revealed on a deeper level. Here, the doctrine of phrenology is of particular importance because character is connected to the shape of the forehead which is not referred to in purely physiognomic studies. The idea that two people are born under the same star might refer to astrological influences, but certainly it is there to strengthen the notion of a spiritual kinship even more.

A similar relationship is described by Jane Eyre when she finally admits to herself and the reader that she loves Mr Rochester:

‘He is not to them what he is to me,’ I thought: ‘he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine – I am sure he is – I feel akin to him – I understand the language of his countenance and movements: though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves that assimilates me mentally to him.[...]’ (JE 174).

In this quotation, physiognomic similarities are placed above rank and wealth, and although her description is rather opaque, she seems to assume that there is something in her body that connects her closer to Mr Rochester than wealth or rank ever could. Physiognomic similarities are applied as a powerful tool against class differences as they confirm what the reader had already anticipated, namely that Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester are destined to be together. This connection cannot be based on similar rank or wealth, but bodily and spiritual kinship are presented as the sole argument. As Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester are the only two characters in the novel who are described as having a spiritual connection of that kind they are somehow elevated above the other characters and their special relationship sets them apart from the other figures in the reader's view.

The last instance of the method discussed is that of the extensive comparison of Ginevra Fanshawe and Pauline de Bassompierre. Lucy Snowe regards them both attentively and finally evaluates their beauty and expression:

At dinner that day, Ginevra and Paulina each looked, in her own way, very beautiful, the former perhaps, boasted the advantage in material charms, but the latter shone pre-eminent for attraction more subtle and spiritual: for light and eloquence of eye, for grace of mien, for winning variety of expression. Ginevra's dress of deep crimson relieved well her light curls, and harmonized with her rose-like bloom. Paulina's attire – in fashion close, though faultlessly neat, but in texture clear and white – made the eye grateful for the delicate life of her complexion, for the soft animation of her countenance, for the tender depth of her eyes, for the brown shadow and bounteous flow of her hair – darker than that of her Saxon cousin, as were also her eyebrows, her eye-lashes, her full irids, and large mobile pupils – Nature having traced all these details slightly, and with a careless hand, in Miss Fanshawe's case; and in Miss de Bassompierre's, wrought them to a high and delicate finish. (V312)

Although Lucy admits that both girls look beautiful in their own way she soon makes clear that Pauline's beauty is to be preferred over Ginevra's. In Pauline Lucy detects a certain spiritual attraction while Ginevra's only advantage seems to be that of material welfare. Pauline's features are generally described as being darker than Ginevra's and when this description is viewed in the light of Lucy's opinion on Ginevra's "fair fragile style of beauty" in section 5.1.4, the dark features are certainly regarded as highly advantageous. What is especially

emphasised about Pauline's appearance is that none of her features is determined or fierce but that they are rather "delicate", "soft", and "tender". Whether these adjectives are used in order to present Pauline as extremely feminine, or just to stress her amiability could be subject to a discussion on the literary depiction of femininity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nature as the creator of both figures is stressed, and it becomes obvious that a certain inborn beauty or ugliness cannot be masked easily. Miss Pauline Bassompierre is presented as the high and delicate finish of a composition of features that might not look so extremely beautiful in a different face where they are seemingly designed less delicate and high.

### **6.5 Nature as a reference**

Some of Charlotte Brontë's descriptions are supported by comparisons to nature which should probably enhance the reader's process of visualising the characters. Most of the comparisons refer to flowers and stormy weather. While comparisons with flowers always symbolise peace and beauty, storm is connected to unpleasant appearances and moods. Men as well as women are described as able to carry both of these features. At the dinner party, Jane Eyre describes Mrs. Eshton's daughters: "both sisters were fair as lilies" (JE 171). Ginevra Fanshawe is described as possessing a "rose-like bloom" (V 312). In the following quotation, the lily-flower is used as a pet name, and probably also refers to the lady's pale, fine appearance: "My lily-flower, you are right now, as always" (JE 177). All these comparisons with flowers conjure in the reader pictures of blooming life, fine shades of colour, and a certain grace that is often connected to flowers like roses or lilies.

Miss Snowe's observation of her pupils presents quite a contrasting picture because she sees in them "a row of eyes and brows that threatened stormy weather" (V 79). The stormy weather can be regarded as a threat to the agreeable flowerlike features described above. Stormy brows are not likely to be positioned in a face that blooms like roses. In the girl's faces, Lucy detects no agreeable features or influences. Lilies and roses give way to stormy eyes and brows.

Lucy Snowe's analysis of Dr Graham Bretton's face is more elaborated, and it juxtaposes the two faces of nature. He is described as being similar to dyes of rose and summer clouds while his countenance rejected stormy or flaming influences: "[...] to bright, soft, sweet influences his eyes and lips gave bright, soft, sweet welcome, beautiful to see as dyes of rose and silver, pearl and purple, embuing summer clouds; for what belonged to storm, what was wild and intense, dangerous, sudden, and flaming, he held no sympathy [...]" (V259).

In comparison to references to literary or historic figures or the construction of stereotypes, this method of finding similarities between characters and nature is unbiased and unproblematic and it does not require the reader to have much background knowledge because things like lilies or roses can be considered items of general knowledge.

## **7 Functions**

The following chapter will offer an insight into the functions achieved by Brontë by the application of the methods described in chapter 6. To provide a link between the previous and the current chapter, it will be useful to shortly discuss what Matt calls "symbolische Vermittlung" ("symbolic mediation") which is a unique feature of language: "Im Vertrauen auf die nachschaffende Kreativität des Lesers kann der Autor aus dem banalen Ding, dem vereinzelt und einzig gesetzten, einzig benannten Teil, einen ganzen leibhaftigen Menschen herauswachsen lassen [...]" (Matt 128). Most of the methods above rely on symbolic mediation to successfully achieve the functions mentioned below. An important precondition of symbolic mediation is a shared set of ideas between reader and writer and is described as follows: Alles symbolisierende Sprechen setzt voraus, daß [sic] der Code, den der Sprecher gebraucht, auch beim Hörer vorhanden ist. Es ist also nur innerhalb einer gesellschaftlichen Gruppe möglich, die bestimmte Konventionen des Denkens und der Verständigung gemeinsam hat." (130). A simple illustration of symbolic mediation as a link between these two chapters would be the following: If the author and the reader have a common idea of the looks of French school girls, their mentioning will trigger in the reader the visualisation of this certain type of character rendering unnecessary a more detailed and lengthy description.

## 7.1 Visualisation

This function of visualising fictional characters within the reader's mind is mentioned in Wolf as mainly contributing to the creation of an "Ästhetische Illusion" (Speaking Faces 424), which might best be compared to the English term "Immersion". According to Murray,

[i]mmersion is a metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged into water. We seek the same feeling from a psychologically immersive experience that we do from a plunge in the ocean or swimming pool: the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus. (98)

Although this definition is taken from an article that mainly deals with immersion into a virtual reality, the concept is equally applicable to literary immersion. A question that is not addressed in the quotation above is the theoretical question that occurs when discussing the process of immersion in greater detail: Is the reader immersed permanently or does he/she switch between the two states of immersion and non-immersion? Wolf summarised what is called "Inkompatibilitätsthese" as follows: The reader is constantly falling in and out of immersion, but the intervals are so short that the actual switching might not be perceived as such. In fact, the general assumption is that the two states can never occur at the same time (see *Ästhetische Illusion* 63-64).

Having clarified the concept of immersion, the next step will be to illustrate the connection between the concept and the function of visualising the characters. It is assumed that a successful novel triggers reader immersion and that the visualisation of characters is an essential process in the mind of the immersed reader. Characters in a book can be seen as components of this new surrounding and therefore play an important role in constructing the immersive literary world. When a reader totally fails in visualising a character, he/she is very likely to fall out of immersion, because he/she is confronted with the limits of the imagined world.

Charlotte Brontë explicitly referred to the phenomenon of immersion in her novel *Shirley*: "You shall **see** them, reader. Step into this neat garden-house on the skirts of Whinbury, walk forward in the little parlour – they are there at

dinner....You and I will join the party, **see what is to be seen**, and hear what is to be heard” [emphasis added] (qut. in Ryan 89). Although Brontë was not yet referring to this concept by the term immersion, the connection between the entering of the fictional world and the imaginative visual perception is clearly stated. In conclusion of this paragraph it can be said that the easier characters can be visualised by the reader, the more likely it is that the reader is immersed into the literary world.

So far, the paper has discussed various methods that can enhance the reader’s readiness and ability to visualise characters, and likewise eventual genre-specific problems have shortly been considered. The following sections will discuss numerous functions that can be achieved by applying the methods from chapter 6.

## **7.2 Marking of identities**

Irwin describes in his book another function of physiognomic portraits: “some particular detail – a feature, an expression – takes on life for the author and becomes a controlling element in the portrayal as it eventually emerges.” (Irwin 18). Wolf refers to the same function in his article “*Speaking faces*”? in which he explains that the method was already detected in Homer’s writing in the form of recurring “epic” adjectives, and relies on the “insistent repetition of singular details” (424). This particular (facial) feature is often used to mark the identities of certain characters in the reader’s mind and serves as an instrument of familiarisation. Instances of this can be found in both novels discussed.

In *Jane Eyre* the reader automatically connects dark, black, or jetty features to Mr Rochester. Whenever a face is described as such, it is as though Mr Rochester’s name was used instead. This function is applied explicitly when Jane Eyre sits down at Gateshead and carelessly draws a picture of somebody and the reader soon recognizes whom this picture is likely to show in the end:

One morning I fell to sketching a face: what sort of a face it was to be, I did not care or know. [...] Soon I had traced on the paper a **broad and prominent forehead** and a square lower outline of visage: that contour gave me pleasure; my fingers proceeded actively to fill it with features. **Strongly-marked horizontal eyebrows** must be traced under that brow;

[...] then a **firm chin**, with a decided cleft down the middle of it; of course, some **black whiskers** were wanted, and some **jetty hair**, tufted on the temples, and waved above the forehead. [emphasis added] (JE 232)

It can be said that the features above are likely to mark the character of Mr Rochester throughout the book, as they are already described in a similar manner when he is observed in detail for the first time in the story: "I knew my traveller, with his **broad and jetty eyebrows**, his **square forehead**, made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his **black hair**" [emphasis added] (JE 122). These features are mentioned repeatedly throughout the book, and no other male character possesses similar features. Mrs Fairfax detects once that there is a female character who resembles Mr Rochester. It is Blanche Ingram who has "eyes rather like Mr Rochester's, large and black, and as brilliant as her jewels" (JE 159). What is important here, however, is that her eyes are not used to mark her character. The attentive reader might still remember what she looked like, and how she is described repeatedly: "Tall, fine bust, **sloping shoulders; long graceful neck**; olive complexion [...] a fine head of hair, **raven-black**, and so becomingly arranged" (JE 159). The same words are used in a different scene: "The noble bust, the **sloping shoulders**, the **graceful neck**, the dark eyes and **black** ringlets were all there" [emphasis added] (JE 171). Although the reader is in fact only supplied with very few facial features, it is possible for him/her to construct before his/her inner eye a whole figure. If related to Gombrich's etc. principle, the amount of descriptive input with which the reader is supplied suffices to successfully visualise the character. The information given by the author is probably transformed differently by each individual reader, and none of the imaginative figures resulting from that process might actually correspond to the one that the author actually had in mind when writing the descriptions. This discrepancy is, however, irrelevant to the achievement of making the characters alive in the reader's psyche. Not even photographic depictions of persons might be perceived in the same way by different observers, and it should therefore not be an author's aim to try to fill all the gaps in the description. This process of concretion has to be accomplished by the reader in order to create his/her personal imaginative pictures.



The same phenomenon can be observed in *Villette* where Paul M. Emmanuel is marked similarly and recognised by Lucy Snow and Ginevra Fanshawe because his features have become familiar to them:

[...] in a second of time, a head, chest, and arms, grew above the crimson desk. This head I knew: its colour, shape, port, expression, were familiar both to me and Miss Fanshawe; the blackness and closeness of cranium, the amplitude and paleness of brow, the blueness and fire of glance, were details so domesticated in the memory, and so knit with many a whimsical association, as almost by this their sudden apparition, to trickle fancy to laugh. (V310)

In this description, Lucy explicitly refers to the effect that is achieved in her, and it is very likely that the reader's experience is just the same, namely that the details of Paul M.'s appearance get domesticated in the memory and knit with association. The description of Paul M. is very detailed, and it refers to the cranium, the brow, and the glance. It is not very likely that the reader remembers all the features in connection with M. Paul, but he/she might just reduce him to the feature that seems most remarkable to him/her. The process of this marking from then on functions in two ways: Firstly, the feature, if mentioned again, instantly makes the reader think of M. Paul, his figure and his moods. Secondly, the name M. Paul makes the reader visualise a little man with fiery, blue eyes. This method certainly relies upon repetition, and if successful, the character becomes alive in the reader's mind, not as a fragmented collection of prominent features but as a coherent image that is associated with certain characteristics.

Jane Eyre is described in very contrasting terms, depending on the spectator's point of view. Mr Rochester describes her as blooming, pretty, and fairy-like, Miss Ingram thinks she looks stupid. Nevertheless, it can be argued that Jane Eyre is a character whose identity is clearly marked by one certain quality of her features, and her own description, although rather vague, is probably the one that leaves the biggest impression on the reader: disconnected, poor and plain. Jane Eyre is the only character in the book that has the authority to mark other characters by ascribing adjectives to their appearance and character. Mr Rochester's description of her enormous beauty is automatically assigned to his emotional state of confusion, and it is not very trustworthy, because he does not even describe her eye-colour properly. Jane Eyre apologizes to the reader for

Mr Rochester's confusion, and by this direct interaction with the reader, which can be observed numerous times, she is set apart from the other characters. She positions herself on the threshold between story and reader. Due to her special position, her own descriptions are most likely to comply with reality in the reader's view.

### **7.3 Creation of tension**

The function of creating tension in the reader is special as it can only be detected in the description of supernatural appearances, always involves the heroines' tension and excitement, and it is not combined with any other functions in the two novels. It is achieved by retarding the actual information that the reader longs to attain, and with the descriptions of the other characters, the reader always gets the impression that information is just provided in time, there is no delay. In the first quotation the deferment is achieved by explicitly posing questions that neither the reader nor the heroine can answer:

Are there wicked things, not human, which envy human bliss? Are there evil influences haunting thin air, and poisoning it for man? What was near me?... Something in that vast solitary garret sounded strangely. Most surely and certainly I heard, as it seemed, a stealthy foot on that floor: a sort of gliding out from the direction of the black recess haunted by the malefactor cloaks. I turned: my light was dim; the room was long- but, as I live! I saw in the middle of that ghostly chamber a figure all black or white; the skirts straight, narrow, black; the head bandaged, veiled, white.

Say what you will, reader – tell me I was nervous, or mad; affirm that I was unsettled by the excitement of that letter; declare that I dreamed: this I vow – I saw there – in that room – on that night – an image like – a NUN (V 244-245).

Although the reader might doubt that there is some ghostly appearance next to Lucy Snowe, the question about who it is that is near her urges to be solved. The first sensual impression described is auditory. She hears something, and at this point, the reader still considers that she could be deluded and that a rational explanation might be found. When, however, Lucy sees somebody, and is even able to describe the figure, the reader is forced to visualise the appearance too. A black, narrow skirt and a white veil is all that the reader gets to know about the nun. When he/she reads further, the nun appears again, being equally difficult to grasp:

"[...] a ray even gleamed white before me, and a shadow became distinct and marked. I looked more narrowly, to make out the cause of this well-defined contrast appearing a little suddenly in the obscure alley: whiter and blacker it grew on my eye: it took shape with instantaneous transformation. I stood about three yards from a tall, sable-robed, snowy-veiled woman [...] She stood mute. She had no face - no features: all below her brow was masked with a white cloth; but she had eyes, and they viewed me" (V297).

The tension in this scene is built up similarly, although the first impression here is a shadow that becomes more distinct and well-defined. The nun is the only figure who is approached in this way. The other character descriptions cannot easily contribute to tension as they are experienced as real, as descriptions of rationally explicable perceptions. In this quotation the tension is not really solved because the reader actually expects to see the features, to finally find out who the mysterious nun is and what she looks like. All the reader gets is the declaration that she has no facial features.

Another instance of creating tension is found in *Jane Eyre* in the red-room-scene. Although what she describes is not actually a face, she treats it similarly, and it feels to Jane Eyre as if someone was near her in the room which makes the scene similar to the appearance of the nun. The only difference here is that nobody ever turns up, and although the ghostly figure turns out only to exist in Jane's head, tension is built up, nevertheless:

I began to recall what I had heard of dead men, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes, revisiting the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed; and I thought Mr Reed's spirit, harassed by the wrongs of his sister's child, might quit its abode [...] and rise before me in this chamber. I wiped my tears and hushed my sobs, fearful lest any sign of violent grief might waken a preternatural voice to comfort me, or elicit from the gloom some haloed face [...] at this moment a light gleamed on the wall. Was it, I asked myself, a ray from the moon penetrating some aperture in the blind? No; moonlight was still, and this stirred [...] prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings; something seemed near me [...]. (JE 18-19)

Although the reader guesses that there is nobody in the room, the tension and fear is carried from the heroine to the reader. Again, *Jane Eyre* asks questions that cannot be answered. This creates uncertainty and tension. In both scenes

described, it is irrelevant whether the envisioned figures are actually real or imagined, because the function of creating tension does not rely on the real existence of the figure described, neither does it rely on their importance throughout the story.

#### **7.4 Guiding reader sympathy**

According to Wolf, detailed descriptions of narrative objects of any kind fulfil different functions, one of them being “Sympathienlenkung” which is closely connected to certain expectations that the reader develops towards the described object (or person): “Solche [detaillierten] Deskriptionen erfüllen dann eine ganze Reihe von Funktionen, die z.T. über die Funktionen lebensweltlicher Gesichtswahrnehmung hinausgehen: Sie [...] tragen zur figurenbezogenen Reliefgebung und Sympathienlenkung bei und können bestimmte Erwartungen wecken“ (Wolf 303). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the expectations of the reader were very often channelled according to the principle of a readable and transparent world. If a character was described as ugly or conspicuous in any other way, the reader usually knew that something evil or unexpected was going to happen in connection to that figure. Conversely, the most beautiful characters were very likely to become the great heroes and heroines. Wolf describes this phenomenon as follows:

“für die Sympathienlenkung v.a. weiblicher Figuren ist die Tendenz zur Beschreibung positiver Charaktere in Konformität mit einem jeweils gültigen Schönheitskatalog rekurrent, ein Verfahren, das Charlotte Brontë mit ihrer Insistenz auf Gewöhnlichkeit des Aussehens ihrer Titelheldin von *Jane Eyre* (1847) markant durchbricht. Umgekehrt dient die Abweichung von einem solchen Standard oftmals negativer Sympathienlenkung [...]“ (Wolf, *Speaking Faces* 424)

It can be argued that Brontë does not only deviate from that rule in her description of the heroine, but likewise Mr Rochester is described as not being conform with beauty ideals of the time as Jane Eyre notices at their first encounter: “Had he been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman, I should not have dared to stand thus questioning him against his will, and offering my services unasked” (JE 115). Paul M. Emmanuel is also described as lacking beauty: “one really did not care to observe that his nose, though far from small, was of no particular shape, his cheek thin, his brow marked and square, his mouth no rosebud: one accepted him as he was” (V 338). Charlotte Brontë

rejects the practice of adjusting the heroic characters to the beauty ideal of her time by explicitly describing them as lacking beauty and charm. Despite their beauty, the reader does not develop any particular sympathy for Blanche Ingram or Ginevra Fanshawe.

Although the reader's sympathy is not guided according to 19<sup>th</sup> century conventions, it can still be said to follow certain rules. It is not left open to the reader to decide who of the characters is amiable as he/she is constantly instructed, sometimes overtly, and sometimes rather subtle.

### **7.5 Plain Heroines and Beauty as a sign of moral deficiency**

The heading of this section might be misleading as it designates a reversal of the 19<sup>th</sup> century convention of "Sympathienkung" that was described in the previous section. The assertion of this chapter is, however, not that Brontë simply applies the rule vice versa, which would again imply total transparency, but rather that she tries to blur the connection between beauty and goodness that had been assumed as being direct and logical. Therefore beauty can be a sign of moral goodness, but it can equally be a sign of moral deficiency, and this is the main argument that will be presented and illustrated in the subsequent paragraphs.

Not only does Brontë explicitly criticise her sisters' effort to create only beautiful heroines, but in the novels discussed, she portrays numerous beautiful characters that turn out to be lacking strength and grandeur of character, examples being Blanche Ingram or Ginevra Fanshawe. Mr Rochester formulates a very powerful statement about women who are beautiful outwardly, but ugly in character:

'To women who please me only by their faces, I am the very devil when I find out they have neither souls nor hearts – when they open to me a perspective of flatness, triviality, and perhaps imbecility, coarseness, and ill-temper; but to the clear eye and eloquent tongue, to the soul made of fire, and the character that bends but does not break – at once supple and stable, tractable and consistent – I am ever tender and true.' (JE 259)

This quotation proves that not only the reader's sympathy is guided. The male protagonist presents views about female beauty that are untypical of the 19<sup>th</sup>

century, and beauty is revealed as being an unreliable indicator of character qualities.

The same scheme is observed in *Villette* where Lucy Snowe and M. Paul are described as being least attractive of all the characters: "Lucy in her plainness and Paul in his outward ugliness are the least aesthetically appealing of the characters of the novel, but by the same token the ones closest to rude nature, with her fierce energies and her unpredictable changes" (Colby 412). Despite their ugliness, both characters attract the reader's sympathy. This is naturally also the case with *Jane Eyre*, who describes herself as plain, poor, and disconnected. What is particularly interesting about her is that she describes herself by these terms. Even if other characters try to flatter her, she insists on her self-perception. The reader does not get the impression that she pities herself but rather that she accepts her plainness as a given fact. She does not show envy for the beautiful women in her surrounding because she does not regard outward beauty as a virtue. She does, however, see herself as a real lady, in comparison to Mrs. Poole:

Mrs. Poole's square, flat figure, and uncomely, dry, even coarse face, recurred so distinctly to my mind's eye [... I hastened to drive from my mind the hateful notion I had been conceiving respecting Grace Poole: it disgusted me. I compared myself with her, and found we were different. Bessie Leaven had said I was quite a lady: and she spoke truth – I was a lady" (JE 156-157).

Thus, she perceives herself as a lady, however not as very remarkable or beautiful. Her modesty is certainly perceived as a virtue, and the fact that she feels sorry about her hateful thoughts towards Mrs. Poole shows that she is indeed very thoughtful, and always eager to improve herself. The description that *Jane Eyre* gives of herself might not be very detailed with regards to her features but it certainly shapes the reader's perception of her character. By her self-perception, and the constant praise of the other characters' beauty, she presents herself as modest, honest, and ready to accept her position.

Dr Graham Bretton is probably one of the few examples of a character who combines bodily perfection and a flawless character. He can indeed be

compared to Pauline, as discussed in section 5.1.2, because like her, he is described as being handsome above average by all the ladies: “Qu’il est vraiment beau, mademoiselle, ce jeune docteur! Quels yeux – quel regard ! Tenez ! J’en ai le cœur tout ému !” [...] what she said about the young doctor was true enough. Graham was handsome; he *had* fine eyes and a thrilling glance” (V 353). Dr Bretton is beautiful and virtuous, and liked by the reader, and by the heroine.

The examples presented make it difficult to detect an underlying pattern in Brontë’s treatment of beauty, but they illustrate that she rejects the idea of readable characters as determining component. The reader’s sympathy is guided towards certain characters, but outward beauty cannot be relied on as a sign of a good character.

## 7.6 Warning

According to Wolf’s article, “Speaking Faces?”, it was common to ascribe to physiognomic face reading an implicitly warning function (“implizit warnende Funktion”) (420) which should help people to structure the reality by putting people into categories according to their features, and to their apparent deviation from a socially accepted norm of appearance. This function decreased in importance when modernism emerged which involved the maceration of the concept of normality (see 420).

In Charlotte Brontë’s novel, the warning function is in fact of great use to the protagonists. Dangerous characters are recognised and feared, and they are certainly marked by their deviation from the aesthetic norm presented in the novel. Bertha’s features are clearly different from all the other features described throughout the story, and with the help of these highly contrasting adjectives, Brontë arises in the reader a certain alertness and a sense of her being not normal: ‘**Fearful** and **ghastly** to me – oh, sir, I never saw a face like it! It was a **discoloured** face – it was a **savage** face. I wish I could forget the roll of the **red eyes** and the **fearful** blackened **inflation of the lineaments!**’ (JE 281).

The quotation below is taken from the scene that precedes Bertha's attack against Mr Rochester. The reader senses that the woman is a threat to the other characters, and Mrs Poole supports this feeling by crying out: "Take care, then, sir! – for God's sake, take care!" (JE 291). The following lines remind more of a beast or a wild dog than of a woman, and the fact that she attacks Mr Rochester with her teeth totally confirms her status as a dangerous character: "The maniac bellowed: she parted her **shaggy locks** from her visage, and gazed **wildly** at her visitors. I recognized well that **purple face** – those **bloated features** [...] the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. (JE 291).

A character that can in some way be compared to Bertha is the nun in *Villette*. She is the mysterious outsider, and like Bertha she appears only in front of the heroine's eyes in the beginning, and is a rather mysterious and uncanny figure:

[...] a shadow became distinct and marked. I looked more narrowly, to make out the cause of this well-defined contrast appearing a little suddenly in the obscure alley: whiter and blacker it grew on my eye: it took shape with instantaneous transformation. I stood about three yards from a tall, sable-robed, snowy-veiled woman. [...] She stood mute. She had no face - no features: all below her brow was masked with a white cloth; but she had eyes, and they viewed me. (V297)

Her appearance is instantaneous, she seems to materialise from thin air. In comparison to all the other characters in the book her features are not visible. She is veiled in black and white clothes, and does not provide Lucy with any opportunity to read her face. The danger lies in the absence of readable features, and in her eyes which seem to be observing Lucy. Although she does not harm anybody physically, she remains the outsider, and the mystery of her countenance is never fully lifted. She can, therefore, not fully enter the reader's imaginative picture gallery. The effect of avoiding any description of her countenance is a reason for perceiving the nun as a threat, as she is the only character whose face cannot be read, and she can therefore not be known or trusted.

The lengthy description of the actress Lucy sees in the theatre with M. Paul and his mother does not in fact refer to one of the fictional characters, but to an actress who only plays her part. This is interesting because she is regarded as



the incarnation of all evil, which probably does not refer to the woman, but rather to the role she plays:

What I saw was the shadow of a royal Vashti: a queen, fair as the day once, turned pale now like twilight, and wasted like wax in flame. For awhile – a long while – I thought it was only a woman, though an [sic] unique woman, who moved in might and grace before this multitude. By-and-by I recognized my mistake. Behold! I found upon her something neither of woman nor of man: in each of her eyes sat a devil. These evil forces bore her through the tragedy, kept up her feeble strength – for she was but a frail creature; and as the action rose and the stir deepened, how wildly they shook her with their passions of the Pit! They wrote HELL on her straight, haughty brow. They tuned her voice to the note of torment. They writhed her regal face to a demoniac mask. Hate and Murder and Madness incarnate, she stood. It was a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation. It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral. (V257)

Although it is obvious that the impression of the actress is a threatening one, it is not clear what actually is so dangerous about her. What makes her so demonic? Dr Bretton evaluates the actress by saying that he „judged her as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgement“ (V 260). This statement reveals that it is of essential importance that the role is played by a woman and at the same time it shows that the woman’s “passionate acting causes her to be rejected by proper society” (Gilbert and Gubar 423). Gilbert and Gubar read this passage of the theatre play as “a statement about the danger of imagination for all women” (423), and a “feminist reaction to patriarchal aesthetics” (424). Although Lucy recognises the role as demonic and guided by evil forces, she thinks that the performance is marvellous and is obviously fascinated by it. To some degree she makes the impression of wishing to find traces of herself in the actress, as the actress “is actually struggling against the fate of the character she plays, much as Lucy struggles against the uncongenial roles she plays” (423), and as a whole the scene can be read as displaying the “revengeful power of female rebellion”, as the theatre literally catches fire, and the “wealthy patrons [rush] outside to save their lives” (Gilbert and Gubar 425).

## **7.7 Reference to basic epistemic assumptions**

“Als Regel kann gelten: Je geborgener sich ein Autor im gesellschaftlichen Normengehege seiner Zeit fühlt, je sicherer er sich darin bewegt, um so

entschiedener wird sein moralisches Urteilen, und um so [sic] geschlossener gestaltet sich ihm das literarische Porträt“ (Matt 103). The rule that Matt formulates is simple and allows direct conclusions from the novel to the author and his/her attitude towards social norms and rules at the time of writing. In the case of Charlotte Brontë's writing her literary portraits would position her as a heavy critic of her time. The heroines and their lovers do not fit into the beauty ideals, but their moral attitudes are respectable, and their deeds mostly virtuous. Brontë's portraits are complete and logical as such, but their interpretation might often have surprised the 19<sup>th</sup> century reader who was probably aware of physiognomic rules and regulations. Characters who are introduced as beautiful with regards to the beauty ideal of the time are revealed as being hallow and satirical within the same paragraph. This contradiction to the general physiognomic assumption of outward beauty being a sign of inward beauty can be traced throughout her novels, and if evaluated according to Matt's rule quoted above, this contradiction might be a sign of Charlotte Brontë not feeling too comfortable within the system of norms at her time.

In the following, Matt finds a common feature of literature written in the bourgeois century, namely that all authors try to fulfil a pedagogic duty. Concerning this principle, Brontë is again to be positioned on the threshold of conformity and non-conformity. Especially in the chapter describing the warning function of physiognomic portraits, the outside appearance was identified as a key to the evil past, a sign of wrong behaviour.

„Die gnadenlose Konsequenz des Porträts stammt vielmehr aus einem Prinzip aller Prosa des bürgerlichen Jahrhunderts: ihrem pädagogischen Auftrag [...] daß [sic] ein Kaputtgehender, ein Außenseiter und überkippende Randsiedler nicht ein Symptom sein darf, für Zeit und Gesellschaft, sondern ein Beispiel abgeben muß [sic] für falsches Verhalten und ‚vertanes‘ Leben“ (Matt 106-107)

Brontë seems to fulfil a pedagogic duty that is different from many of her contemporaries'. Her message is that it is not always obvious who is an outsider or an unmoral person but that the individual has to judge about this not only on the basis of obvious criteria. She supports the notion that the truth might be veiled and more complex than initially assumed.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century novel is generally regarded as having been written during the heyday of the belief in a total readability of the world although also authors at that time sometimes questioned this naïve belief in transparent faces (see Wolf, *Speaking Faces* 395). An example of this is given in Irwin who claims that “George Eliot knows, in fact often preaches, that external appearance is no simple indicator of moral character” (Irwin 26). The fact that Brontë’s heroines are all plain while their enemies are beautiful is a vehement critique of the simple equation which was also rejected by George Eliot.

If, however, an unambiguous readability was proclaimed it always relied on the reduction of existent individuals onto certain types (or rather stereotypes). As has been made explicit in section 6.3 Brontë makes use of this method, and this is a signal of her belief in physiognomic readability, at least to some extent. Furthermore, her attempt to structure and simplify her fictional world can be regarded as an indicator of herself being conform to this trend of detecting a logical order in a world that was becoming more and more complex and unclear due to increased mobility.

Although the following quotation does not explicitly refer to Charlotte Brontë’s writing it can reasonably be applied to it as it generally describes literary works from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Matt’s explanation is firstly a source for epistemic references, and secondly a useful connection between this section discussing interfaces between Charlotte Brontë’s writing and her reality and the following chapter which will try to position Charlotte Brontë’s novels within a 19<sup>th</sup> century literary context and compare it to other well-known authors of the time.

„Erneut wird der Kopf zum Moralsystem in der Erscheinung, abgestützt auf eine Allerweltsphysiognomik, die ihre Herkunft von Lavaters wildesten Behauptungen nicht verleugnen kann. Der Auftrag, dem sich die Dichter und die Gelehrten des Bürgerlichen Jahrhunderts gleicherweise unterstellt sahen, den sittlichen Stand der lesenden Öffentlichkeit zu heben und zwar nicht nur, indem sie die Wahrheit sagten und die Wirklichkeit zeigten, sondern indem sie gleichzeitig ausführten, was von dieser Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit zu halten und wie sie für Heim und Leben zu verwerten sei, dieser Auftrag wird in dem wiederholten Wechsel des Textes von der Deskription zur Sinngebung augenfällig. (Matt 114)

Charlotte Brontë’s heroines do not represent reality in a mimetic approach but they usually evaluate it according to their personal impressions. This is not only

true of the characters, but also of the places described in the novels. Her first impression when she enters Thornfield Hall is that she finds herself in a “snug, small room; a round table by a cheerful fire; an arm-chair, high-backed and old-fashioned” (JE 97). She does not only enable the reader to visualise the figures, but she positions the figures in surroundings that are described vividly and rather mirror her feelings towards the places than they mirror their actual appearance. It is not definitely traceable from her writing that she tried to elevate the readers’ moral stand, she does not really present clear morals lessons which the reader can obey. What she rather promotes is a departure from simple rules and lessons and an approach towards the acceptance of reality as a complex multi-layered construct that cannot be understood by everybody likewise.

## **8 Brontë in a 19th century literary context**

“Reading contemporary reviews of the Brontë novels is a depressing business” (Winnifrith and Chitham 113). These numerous reviewers condemning the novels of the Brontë sisters have retrospectively been blamed of having failed to recognise the true qualities of the writings. Their “failure to live up to the standards of their time” (ibid. 114) was later identified as being the greatest strength of the Brontë novels and the reason why they “have remained popular with all cultures and all generations” (ibid. 114). Although the timelessness of Charlotte and Emily Brontë’s novels has been proven by their constant success throughout the previous decades, the novels contain statements on topics that were particularly prevalent in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Winnifrith and Chitham explicitly mention the relationship between the social classes on the one hand, and relations between the sexes on the other hand.

### **8.1 Class distinctions and sexual relationships**

In the two novels discussed, the boundaries between classes are neither very clear nor are they impossible to transcend. Although Jane Eyre as well as Lucy Snowe are clearly suffering from the lack of wealth and connections at the beginnings of their journeys but their situation changes drastically. Jane Eyre is

elevated to a higher status by a fortunate heritage and reaches her personal happy end by marrying Sir Edward Rochester as her equal. Lucy Snowe finally reaches financial independence through her lover, M. Paul Emmanuel, who provides her with her own school and enables her to work as a headmistress. The fates of the heroines are marked by insights into different classes, and there is no condemnation of the injustice of class differences, although it does become clear that there is a potential for conflicts between members of different classes. Examples of this are the troublesome relationship between Jane Eyre and the Reed siblings, or Blanche Ingram's demeaning attitude towards Jane Eyre and her class. *Jane Eyre* cannot rightfully be seen as a "symbol of the downtrodden classes fighting her way through life by the strength of her own personality" (Winnifrith and Chitham 115) because although the heroine is virtuous and proud, it is not primarily her character but rather her heritage which finally saves her. Similarly, the text does not really support the "reviewers of 1848 who saw *Jane Eyre* as a revolutionary book in that year of revolutions" (ibid. 115), at least not a revolution concerning the subversion of class conventions. Winnifrith and Chitham conclude by saying that "[n]obody could really say that the Brontës had any very useful or consistent message to give about the position of the classes in Victorian England, although today the confusion of these classes and our confused attitude to them makes this failure unimportant" (116).

The treatment of sexual relationships between men and women in Charlotte Brontë's novels is regarded as being extraordinarily liberal and honest for Victorian times. Especially the role of woman and the ideas of femininity are overtly discussed and criticised. This is probably due to the fact that "they [the Brontë sisters] were unaware of English Victorian standards, having done so much of their reading among foreign authors or authors of a previous generation" (Winnifrith and Chitham 116). In a way, this sets the Brontë sisters apart from other authors of the time. Jane Austen, Thackeray, Dickens, and "[e]ven writers as broad-minded and kind as George Eliot and Mrs Gaskell", each in their own way, write in accordance to the sexual morality of their time (see ibid 116-117). The reason for the great controversy and rejection with which *Jane Eyre* was met is that it does not meet the "extreme Victorian attitude

that women should have no sexual feelings, and that sexual matters should not be mentioned” (ibid 117). Mr Rochester’s attempted adultery and Jane’s rushing into Mr Rochester’s bedroom at night are not evaluated negatively, the characters are not punished and Victorian readers did not react positively to this rejection of moral rules (see ibid 117).

## **8.2 Charlotte Brontë and other authors**

Class difference and sexual relationships are certainly important aspects in both novels and the modern reader is warned not to “ignore how very un-Victorian the Brontës were in their social and sexual views” (Chitham and Winniffrith 118). Other female Victorian authors recognised in the novels the deviation from common norms and this evoked a certain conflict:

On the one hand, they felt the need for solidarity in the face of prejudice, as some critics still held, with Coventry Patmore, that women were naturally debarred by their limited abilities from ‘the properly masculine power of writing books’. Yet on the other hand, a book such as *Jane Eyre* might bring women’s writing into disrepute. Charlotte’s sister authors could not ignore the sensationally successful Currer Bell [Charlotte Brontë’s pseudonym], whose literary talents were too obvious not to recognise. But they felt uncomfortable about her, perhaps fearing that her passionate aesthetic might inflame prejudice towards authoresses in general. The solution to this discomfort was to pathologise Charlotte’s literary imagination, while clutching at the mitigating evidence of her personal delicacy, miserable life and isolated upbringing. (Miller 28)

If regarded against the background of this fear and uncertainty that emerged among woman writers at the time in reaction to Charlotte Brontë’s novels, biographies written by her colleague authoresses are to be evaluated as presenting a rather blurred picture of Charlotte Brontë and consciously omitting the description of certain characteristics: “Elizabeth Gaskell [Charlotte Brontë’s biographer] never fully engaged with the powerful, intense and uncompromising side of Charlotte’s personality – that part which went into her novels under the name of Currer Bell” (Miller 29). The strategy of Charlotte Brontë’s colleagues to successfully cope with her literature and position it within their Victorian worldview was to dismiss it as morbid and Charlotte Brontë as being unable to bear her tragic fate without producing literature of that kind: “The novel was “publicly labelled morbid [and] Lucy Snowe’s mentality [was] too complex to be

healthy and [...] her inner conflicts and sexual desires were far from the experience of normal women and should never have been written about" (Miller 51).

What was so threatening about Charlotte Brontë's literature was not only that she identified new possible roles for women within man-woman relationships but that she showed that roles assigned to women in general were in fact unrealistic and not human. It is therefore not surprising that not only her writing, but also she as a woman was vehemently criticised by famous male authors of the time:

[Lucy] would shock Victorian readers not because she suffers, but because she responds to that suffering with what Matthew Arnold disapprovingly called 'hunger, rebellion and rage'. When she visits an art gallery, she finds that culture divides women into two stereotypes, neither of which is fully human. [...] Unable to conform to either of these bankrupt options, is it really surprising that Lucy breaks down? (Miller 48)

The description of Lucy Snowe's struggle with Victorian conventions and role models was perceived as a rebellious act and what alerted the masses was that it offered one of the first realistic and unveiled representations of a woman's inner self or as Miller says: "the real subject of the book is the heroine's turbulent inner world" (47). It is therefore not surprising that not only *Villette* but also Charlotte Brontë was viewed as a potential threat to the Victorian values of passive womanhood and sexual tabooing. A certain Miss Martineau, an authoress colleague and friend of Charlotte Brontë is said to have feared that "Currer Bell would play into the hands of those men who dismissed single women writers as sex-starved spinsters seeking compensatory thrills" (Miller 51). Many women writers perceived Charlotte Brontë's progressive writing as dangerous and harmful to the reputation of authoresses and to the social order in general.

It is obvious that Brontë's contemporaries recognised her subversive potential, and her writing was praised and deemed likewise. Although she can be regarded as presenting conflicting attitudes about physiognomic

readability, class distinctions and sexual liberty the following statement gives an account of her enormous impact on novel writing, and justifies the enormous popularity of her novels throughout centuries: “For all the anguish Charlotte undoubtedly experienced she was also a woman of toughness, ambition and creative boldness, able to break the mould of the conventional English novel” (Miller 29).

## **Conclusion**

It was the aim of this paper to critically observe two of Charlotte Brontë's novels with regards to physiognomic descriptions and their importance within her work. In the course of the research that preceded the writing it became clearer and clearer that it would be impossible to simply interpret Brontë's work as a plea for Lavater's theories, because her application of physiognomic principles and her interpretation of physiognomic appearances is surely not always made according to Lavater's original ideas and is so multifaceted that it is indeed very likely to be contradictory, and raise questions about the author's actual intention with regards to the spreading of physiognomic ideas.

The important endeavour of illustrating that physiognomy as a science has a history the beginning of which probably dates back to the time of Sokrates is undergone in chapter 2. It shows that the science had already undergone a long process of development when Lavater started researching into the field and made it enormously popular. Before the main focus is put on the analysis of primary sources, chapter 3 examines those features that are unique to physiognomic descriptions in the medium of the novel, devoting one separate section to problems and shortcomings that have to be overcome when depicting figures in the written medium. Lavater's three basic principles that stood at the centre of his doctrine as well as his concept of beauty discussed in chapter 2 are then applied to passages from the primary sources in chapters 4 and 5, which closely investigate each single character from the two novels under discussion. The last part of the paper is devoted to an analysis that of methods and functions, and does therefore not refer to single characters, but to underlying patterns in each of the two novels. The question discussed in



chapter 6 is how Brontë makes use of elements of style and conscious representation to place characters in one or the other light, or to present them as companions or antagonists. Some of Brontë's methods are revealed to follow Lavater's principles, and others are to be seen as operating independently from physiognomic ideas.

The core of the paper is illustrated in chapter 7 where finally the functions as achieved in the various novels are closely examined. Among more obvious functions like the visualisation of characters or the creation of tension, the chapter provides quotations from the primary sources which are definitely fulfilling functions such as warning the reader, marking figural identities or allowing conclusions to epistemic assumptions valid at the time of Brontë's writing. The function of explicitly producing plain heroines and beautiful villains is probably one of the most striking facts about Charlotte Brontë's writing, and the passages from her novels that make this intention explicit are quoted and analysed.

The last chapter is important to enable a contextualisation of the information presented in this paper. It is shown in how far Brontë's treatment of a readable reality differs from that of other authors, and there will be a short reference to the general reception of her writing, putting an emphasis on those aspects that were perceived as particularly shocking in Victorian times. As a concluding remark, it can be said that physiognomic descriptions are woven into most of the literature produced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the conclusion to which most literary scholars have come, and this paper strongly supports the notion, is that none of them are to be regarded as innocent or as mere mimetic descriptions. They are firstly fulfilling functions in the process of reader perception that are worth being examined closely, and secondly the fact that they are always interpretative and connected to the norm system of the time in which they were designed, they are very likely to allow conclusions to the episteme of which the author was part, and are therefore valuable sources of information to literary scholars.

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## **German Summary**

Die Arbeit befasst sich mit der Bedeutung physiognomischer Beschreibungen in zwei von Charlotte Brontë's Romanen, *Jane Eyre* und *Villette*. Das Hauptaugenmerk liegt hierbei in der Betrachtung der Methoden, die die Autorin in Bezug auf die Beschreibung ihrer Charaktere anwendet und die Funktionen, die ebendiese erfüllen. Ziel der Arbeit ist es, die Bedeutung physiognomischer Beschreibungen in Hinblick auf deren Einfluss auf die Wahrnehmung des Lesers genauer zu untersuchen und neue Erkenntnisse auf diesem Gebiet mit bereits bekannten zu verbinden.

Einleitend wird die Geschichte der Physiognomik als Wissenschaft erläutert und die Theorien Johann Caspar Lavaters, der als eine der wichtigsten Figuren in Bezug auf physiognomische Forschung gilt, zusammengefasst. Im Zuge dessen ist der Schönheitsbegriff von besonderer Wichtigkeit, und im zweiten Teil der Arbeit, der Stellen aus den Primärtexten untersucht, wird der Schönheitsbegriff in Charlotte Brontë's Arbeit in Verbindung mit dem physiognomischen Konzept äußerlicher und innerlicher Schönheit gesetzt. Da jegliche Wahrnehmung schriftlich festgehaltener Physiognomien auf komplexen kognitiven Prozessen aufbaut, ist ein Kapitel des theoretischen ersten Teils eben diesen Vorgängen gewidmet. Ein wichtiger Punkt hierbei ist die Rolle der Mediatisierung sämtlicher Textstellen und der Besonderheiten und Unzulänglichkeiten des schriftlichen Mediums.

Nach der Vermittlung der theoretischen Grundlage und des nötigen Hintergrundwissens in den ersten drei Kapiteln, widmen sich die weiteren Abschnitte der Analyse der Primärtexte. Jeder der beiden Romane wird gesondert auf Physiognomiebeschreibungen untersucht und es werden detaillierte Porträts der jeweiligen Charaktere erstellt. Schon hierbei lassen sich gewisse Erzählmuster und Methoden erahnen, welche im darauffolgenden Abschnitt explizit erläutert werden. Die Methoden, die präsentiert werden, sind teilweise aus bereits bestehender Literatur übernommen und teilweise eigens konstruierte Ansätze. Die dem Werk zugrunde liegenden Methoden und Erzählmuster werden in weiterer Folge auf etwaiges Potenzial zur Erfüllung gewisser Funktionen untersucht. Neben der bereits ausführlich erörterten Visualisierungsfunktion werden auch Spannungsstiftung und Warnungsfunktion an Beispielen aus Charlotte Brontë's Romanen erläutert und

Schönheit bzw. Hässlichkeit in der Beschreibung wichtiger Charaktere wird in Bezug auf Lenkung der Lesersympathie genauer untersucht.

Um eine Einordnung der Erkenntnisse rund um Brontë's Arbeit in deren Entstehungszeit zu ermöglichen, widmet sich der letzte Teil der Arbeit einer Darstellung der Autorin und ihrer Arbeit im Umfeld des 19. Jahrhunderts und nimmt Bezug auf damals umstrittene Themen in der Arbeit der Autorin und auf Charlotte Brontë's Einzigartigkeit in Bezug auf literarische Tätigkeit im bürgerlichen Jahrhundert.

## **Curriculum Vitae**

Anna Wöckinger

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### **Ausbildung**

Seit 2006: Studium der Anglistik und Amerikanistik

2006-2008: Studium am Institut für Slawistik (Russisch)

06/2006: Matura am ORG Pichelmayergasse

2002-2006: Ausbildung am BRG Pichelmayergasse mit musikischem Schwerpunkt

1998-2002: Volksschule Laaerberg

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### **Berufserfahrung**

07-09/2011: geringfügige Beschäftigung im administrativen Bereich und in der Kundenbetreuung in der Firma "EHA Stahlbau"

Seit Februar 2009: marginal employment at the community college in the 10<sup>th</sup> district of Vienna as an English teacher for children

02-12/2008: Arbeit im Callcenter des OGM (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Marketing)

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### **Zusatzausbildungen**

Absolvierte Kurse im Ausmaß von 22 Sst. an der Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien im Bereich Internationale Betriebswirtschaftslehre mit Schwerpunkt auf englischer und russischer Wirtschaftskommunikation

07-08/2007: Teilnahme an einem "Sprachtandem" in Nishnij Novgorod (Russland) im Rahmen eines universitären Sprachaustausches

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**Sprachkenntnisse**

Deutsch (Muttersprache)  
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